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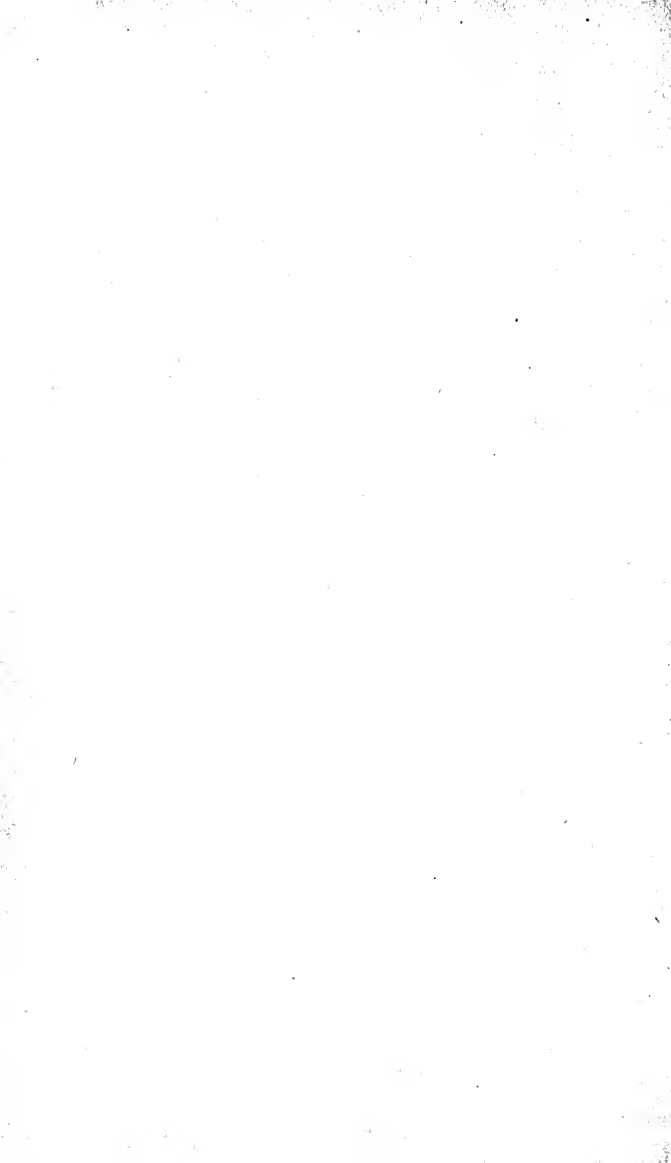
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A

BRIEF VIEW
OF
THE ENGLISH DRAMA,

FROM THE

Earliest Period to the Present Time :

WITH SUGGESTIONS

FOR ELEVATING THE PRESENT CONDITION OF THE ART,
AND OF ITS PROFESSORS.

BY F. G. TOMLINS,

AUTHOR OF "THE PAST AND PRESENT STATE OF DRAMATIC
ART AND LITERATURE," ETC.



LONDON:

C. MITCHELL, RED LION COURT, FLEET STREET.

MDCCCXL.

1840

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LONDON :
WILLIAM STEVENS, PRINTER, BELL YARD,
TEMPLE BAR.

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TO

JEREMIAH HOW, ESQ.

MY DEAR HOW.

WORDS are but a poor return for deeds, and yet, as sincere expressions of sentiments, they may sometimes produce substantial gratification, at least to the utterer, and in this belief I dedicate my little book to you, one of my oldest and kindest friends.

I do not fear but that the subject is worthy of your attention, for it relates to poetry and the elegant arts ; and in these you have been gifted with a pure taste and a discriminating judgment, and to their professors have ever shown a delicate attention and frequently valuable assistance. As to your opinion of the manner in which they are here treated, I may be more anxious ; but I am at least sure if there is any merit, you will be one of the first to

discover it, for your criticism is of that more rare and difficult kind, which elicits excellences as well as deficiencies.

I must conclude, lest that worst of taints should be thrown on our friendship, that it is the result of interest, and is maintained by flattery.

“ No ! let the candied tongue lick absurd pomp ;
And crook the pregnant hinges of the knee,
Where thrift may follow fawning.”

Friendship is too rare and too sacred a thing to be sullied by even a suspicion, and I will therefore content myself with saying, I am, more than words can express,

Your sincere and obliged friend,

THE AUTHOR.

PREFACE.

THE greater part of the following pages were originally published in *The Sunday Times*, under the title of *Dramatic Prolusions*. They are now republished at the suggestion of, perhaps partial, friends, who desire to possess them in a more portable shape.

The subject is one which has ever been passionately pursued by the writer, from a feeling that we possess a national drama unequalled, and indeed unapproached by any other country, ancient or modern. To honour the illustrious dead, and do justice to the living, should be the aim of every public writer, and this sentiment has elicited the following pages. In the struggle of 1832, the author took a share, to the utmost of his ability, and the only merit he now ventures to claim, is the revival of the subject of the monopoly, after a seven years' slumber, even in

opposition to the opinion of many experienced persons, who declared there was not a glimmer of hope for the oppressed drama. Such is, happily, not the case, for the reception of the author's pamphlet on "The Past and Present State of Dramatic Literature," has elicited the almost universal assistance of the press. It has also enabled the writer to induce persons more influential than himself to take an interest in the cause, with whom it is now progressing in the most promising manner. These results are sufficient reward to the author, and he commits his present trifling production and the not trifling cause to the protection of the press and the public, confident that they have the "grace to execute justice and to maintain truth."

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A

BRIEF VIEW

OF

THE ENGLISH DRAMA,



&c. &c.

CHAPTER I.

ORIGIN OF THE CLASSICAL DRAMA.

Abstract Idea of the Drama—Classical and Romantic Drama
—Origin of the Classical Drama—The Nature of the Classical Drama.

THE activity of the present age, exciting as it does, by its spirit of adventure and discovery, the passions and the imagination, is peculiarly adapted to the development of the dramatic art. This tendency, however, requires for its full manifestation other aids than the mere capacity of the time to receive and encourage it; and to examine into the principles that govern, and to trace, by the history of the past, the circumstances that affect this portion of the fine arts, is the aim of the present essays. They are not undertaken to support any theory or party; they are not issued with any idea of their infallibility;

and have little other claim on the reader than that they are the production of one who has, on this subject at all events, read and examined for himself. The illustrious Lessing prefaced his treatises on the same subject with the following apology, which must apply, in a tenfold degree, to the present efforts — “ Let my readers remember that these papers are not intended to form a dramatic system. I am not obliged to solve all the difficulties that I myself start. It is of little consequence if my thoughts are sufficiently connected, or if they are sometimes contradictory. It is enough if they may furnish matter on which my reader may exercise his own judgment. I only wish to scatter *fermenta cognitionis*.”

The word “ drama ” is one of the most comprehensive in our language, embracing extremes and almost opposites ; although, to the utter confusion of argument, it is frequently used as an expressive definition of one kind of theatrical performance. Of the variety it embraces some idea may be formed by the list of abbreviations prefixed to Baker’s *Biographia Dramatica*, wherein thirty-one different kinds of plays are specified, from “ tragical, comical, historical, pastoral,” to tragedy and comedy. Each of these again vary greatly, for tragedy includes the ‘ Siege of Damascus ’ and ‘ Hamlet,’ and comedy comprises the ‘ Soldier’s Daughter ’ and ‘ Volpone ;’ the differences are, indeed, too numerous for classification. They are all, however, connected by the

essential principle as defined by Johnson, who, after Aristotle, says, "Drama, a poem in which the action is not related but represented." In which definition (though liable, like all others, to objection) two things are more particularly to be observed : first, that a drama of any kind must have poetry (that is, the imagination must be exercised upon it), and, secondly, that it must have action. In what mode or form these two essential qualities will be developed, depends greatly on the individual exercising the art, and on the taste of the audience ; but a drama must possess them in a greater or less degree, or its specification will be altered. As in every disquisition reference must be occasionally made to first principles, it is necessary to direct the reader's attention to these facts ; for the want of the consideration of which a great deal of learned argument seems to have been cast away, each writer having eulogised his favourite amusement at the expense of others, which in their kind might be equally perfect.

Two of the chief modern divisions of the drama have been the classical and the romantic, which perhaps might be better expressed as the ancient and modern, or the Aristotelian and the Shakspearean ; and as these two classes are the most important, it will not be impertinent to dwell a little on their relative claims and principles.

It is pretty well agreed by all persons who are any authority on the subject, that the classical and

romantic drama may be considered as separate inventions; although by a strange process the one may have arisen from the other. The romantic arose undoubtedly from the religious mysteries, and these are said to have arisen from barbarous imitations of the classical. Whether this was the case or not, little affects the question as to the originality of the romantic drama, as the previous transmutation of the classical drama into a religious mystery, caused the romantic drama to evolve from the latter with an entirely new form and principles, and they must be considered as two different classes, though of the same family. They have, however, one peculiarity in common; they both had a religious origin, and both of them subsequently became obnoxious to priestcraft. The essential difference between them seems to be traceable to national differences, exemplified by equal opposition in other branches of the arts of poetry and design, and would seem to warrant that distinction which the Greeks made between themselves and the rest of the world by the epithet barbarian. Whether the superiority thus claimed was entirely warranted, is still a vexed question, and if the conception, and not the execution, is the point at issue, it would appear that the barbarians are gaining ground. It would seem that if the classical productions were inimitably executed, they were not so daringly conceived; and that there were many echoes in the heart of human sympathies, which their stricter

notions did not permit them to arouse. To one collection of writings, but that they are appealed to as inspired by Omnipotence, we might refer as a proof that there are many chords of human sensibility that were never touched by the refined genius of the classical nations; and, at all events, in more modern times we may name our own Shakspeare as opening a new region of poetic delight. The point, however, is not to decide on the relative merits of the two classes, but to point out their qualities, leaving the taste (that child of association and sensibility) to decide in its own wilful way.

For the origin of the classical drama, we are told, we must transport ourselves to a village in Attica; the time, upwards of five hundred years before the Christian era, where a Greek kind of harvest-home, or vintage feast, gives a loose to rustic jollity. Under a glowing sky we shall see the lusty youths dancing with increased energy from the consumption of the product the peculiar object of the divinity they worship. On the ground, in the middle of a large circle, lies a bundle, which, on nearer inspection, proves to be a kind of sack made of a goat's skin with the hair-side within. This sack, filled with wine, already sufficiently smooth, is made more so by being greased with oil. Reiterated are the shouts which attend the failure of successive attempts of the lively boors to hop on to this slipping, sliding lump, and there maintain a footing. At last the feat is performed, and the victor is rewarded with its

contents for his cleverness. Having sacrificed the flesh of the goat, whose skin they have thus made sport with, they smear their faces with the lees of the wine, and give a loose to rustic raillery and gibing. Gratitude and idolatry are natural to the heart of man, and the wiser and better contrived to turn this exuberance of spirits to higher purposes. Hymns of gratitude, coarsely but simply expressed, were poured to the Being they supposed thus bountifully supplied their wants, and they chanted the double birth of their god Bacchus, or Dionysos, in stanzas, afterwards named 'Dithyrambic.' In time other ceremonies are introduced, and with them new hymns. Repetition is itself a portion of regularity, and induces system. A regular chorus of fifty was next appointed to sing the praises of the vine-protecting deity, which danced in a circle round the altar, chanting the, no doubt, previously prepared odes. That too great a draught, however, might not be made on the patience and devotion of the laughter-loving boors, a minor chorus, representing the attendants of the god (the shaggy satyrs), enlivened the spectacle by their grotesque appearance, monstrous grimaces, and exuberant mirth.

The ludicrous and the serious alternately sway the mind and the feelings, and the generality of mankind are capable of very quick transition from one to the other. By which of these it is most easy to maintain a control over an audience is still a mooted point: but as mediocre gravity, from its having

some advantages, is more endurable than mediocre wit, it is certain that the comic writers have more frequently verged towards the grave, than the grave towards the comic. Whether this was the case with Thespis, the first introducer (as it is said) of the heroic narrative, is not known. Whatever induced him, he, however, has the credit of introducing between the foregoing ceremonies or performances, a kind of monologue, wherein he enacted, with appropriate gesture, some incident from the history of a popular god or hero, having no other interlocutors but the chorus, whose songs he thus diversified. In addition to this stroke of genius, he was a clever manager. His chorus was well drilled, both in expression and gesture, and his fame spreading, he moved from village to village.

Such is the popular account of the first dawn of the drama; but, like all inventions that are the product of successive minds, its history is involved in great obscurity. The essential principle of the drama, which is the imitation of action and feeling, expressed by gesture and dialogue, seems to be a natural expression. The youngest children mimic and perform what they see; and the rudest savages describe with imitative gesture. The lively and imaginative inhabitants of ancient Greece were peculiarly likely to manifest this natural tendency, and consequently we find in the very earliest times the traces of a drama; and it appears now to be the opinion of the learned that the Dorian choruses, as

being a kind of lyrical dialogue, were the first manifestations of the Grecian drama. Traces of a dramatic principle to this extent might be found still earlier in the Psalms of the Hebrew monarch. The next step was the junction of the Ionian rhapsodes, a kind of minstrels who chanted the epic poems. Impassioned recitation implies action, and when two or more rhapsodes were alternately recited from the *Iliad* or any popular poem, it must have approached very close to dramatic dialogue. This union of the heroic narrative with the religious choral ode, is attributed to Thespis, though it is not easy to understand exactly what new element he introduced; perhaps we shall approach nearest to it if we designate it "Personation." He probably ultimately threw aside the narrative entirely; and we know he used the mask, which he is said to have invented, together with other arts calculated to heighten the impersonation.

It is not the aim of this work to give a perfect history of the drama, but only to trace it to its origin, so far as will develop the principles on which it is founded. We have now seen that the classical drama was the offspring of a religious ceremony and high-wrought poetry, and these two essential qualities were destined to ever control and guide it. Sanctioned by religion, and consecrated subsequently by genius, the tragic drama of the ancients took a permanent form, that was retained and communicated with all the tenacity and impetus of those

powerful auxiliaries. Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, perfected the original outline, and did not greatly vary from it, though Æschylus added a second, and Sophocles a third person to the scene. The essential qualities of the drama were now determined to consist of fine lyric poetry, lofty and excursive, appealing to the wide circle of human feelings, and manifesting preceptorial wisdom ; the movement or story was subservient to the main religious and moral object of the drama, and the few actors introduced were but sparing of action, though they were occasionally placed in situations where impassioned feelings were expressed in powerful language. Their woes were minutely related, and their feelings developed at a length which, to modern audiences, would seem tedious in the extreme. And herein consists the vital difference between the ancient and modern drama, a difference which it is very necessary to observe in all disquisitions as to their relative merits, and one which, in fact, renders any lengthened comparison between them impossible.

In the ancient drama the religious spectacle was predominant, and the entertaining action only episodical. The lyric songs of the chorus, the splendid spectacle, the eloquent language, was in itself nearly sufficient for their audience ; and the action could afford to be languid, if it was discriminated with a knowledge of human nature, adorned with splendid diction, and rendered effective by powerful appeals



to the feelings. Its object was "to raise the genius," and to elevate the moral sentiments, by the exhibition of heroic actions, and sublimed examples. Its construction rendered it simple in its plot, though it availed itself of all the external aids that scenery, dresses, and such adjuncts could afford. It partook of the nature of a highly-refined spectacle, appealing at once to the senses, the feelings, and the judgment. It was lofty and overpowering, touching and sublime. Thus originated, and thus applied, what has it in common with our household and domestic tragedy, which has for its foundation reality, and is applied to map the heart of man through the agency of an intricate series of incidents and sensations? But the comparison, or rather the dis-comparison, will be more effectively displayed after we have glanced over the rise and progress of the romantic or modern drama.

CHAPTER II.

ORIGIN OF THE ROMANTIC DRAMA.

Origin of the Romantic Drama—Miracle Plays—Moralities—
Dawn of the English Drama—Dramatic Tendency of the
16th Century.

It has been shown how the essential qualities of the classical drama were engendered and developed; and it will now be necessary to give the same attention to the origin of the romantic drama.

St. Augustin, who died about A.D. 430, refers in his writings to heathen theatrical exhibitions as still in existence, and of course condemns them, as well for their licentiousness as for their connexion with idolatry. Gregory Nazianzen, an earlier father of the church, however, is said, nearly a century before, to have constructed a drama on the Passion of Christ, to counteract the profanities of the heathen stage; and thus to have laid the foundation of the modern romantic drama. This, however, appears not to be by any means proved, but it seems exceedingly probable that the ministers of the Christian religion, who were able and politic, as well as pious

men, should contrive to turn the inordinate love of public exhibitions, inherent in the Greek and Roman nations, into a channel that would aid the extension of Christian doctrines.

The rapidly-increasing decay of the empire after the fourth century, and the corruption of ancient manners by the influx of successive barbarous nations, has involved the three following centuries in the dunnest obscurity, and left us little means of ascertaining its physical or intellectual condition. In the year 990, a patriarch of Constantinople, named Theophylact, is said to have invented some kind of theatrical exhibitions, which, though meant, or pretending, to honour God and the saints, were thought by his more sedate contemporaries to dishonour and scandalize them. At the end of the 12th century we find Fitzstephen, in his "Life of Thomas à Becket," asserting "that London had for its theatrical exhibitions holy plays, and the representation of miracles wrought by sacred confessors, or representations of the agonies whereby the faith of martyrs had been glorified." Hereafter we appear to have a more steady light to guide our progress, and it is indisputably proved that this kind of drama had become widely spread and firmly established, by the 'Chester Mysteries,' which were performed towards the latter part of the 13th century, about 1270. Of these productions, manuscript copies have come down to us, though probably not

in the state they were originally composed. Mr. Payne Collier (to whom all lovers of the drama and of literary antiquities are deeply indebted) thinks they were originally written in French. In speaking of these kind of productions, he says, "In their earliest state these pieces were of the simplest construction, merely following the incidents of Scripture, or of the pseudo-evangelium, the dialogue being maintained by the characters there introduced. By degrees, however, more invention was displayed, particularly with reference to the persons concerned in the conduct of the story." He also tells us that, "Besides a few other single pieces, there exist in this country three sets of miracle plays, which go through the principal incidents of the Old and New Testaments." These collections are 'The Towneley,' or 'Widkirk,' comprising thirty plays; 'The Coventry,' consisting of forty-two plays; and 'The Chester,' possessing twenty-four. The titles of a few will give some idea of their nature. In 'The Coventry' are—'The Creation,' 'The Fall of Man,' 'The Death of Abel,' 'Noah's Flood,' 'Abraham's Sacrifice,' 'Moses and the Ten Tables,' 'The Genealogy of Christ,' 'Anna's Pregnancy,' 'Pilate's Wife's Dream,' &c.

As miracle plays were originated by the ecclesiastics as a rude mode of exciting the admiration, and fixing the attention of a barbarous populace on the great events of the creed they taught, so they were

at first principally enacted by them. In process of time, however, this duty was transferred to the guilds of artisans of various cities, who performed them, no doubt, as a species of agreeable devotion, and who, while thus manifesting the fervour of their faith, relieved the ecclesiastics of considerable expense. They were performed on stages or scaffolds, and had many rude mechanical contrivances to aid their representation, and lasted many hours for successive days. The actors were numerous, and the pageants costly. The language is so homely as to appear absurd and almost blasphemous to us at the present day; but as Mr. Collier says, "In judging of the form, incidents, and language of these productions, we must, of course, carry our minds back to the period when they were written; we shall find then, that much that now seems absurd, ludicrous, and profane, was then pious, awful, and impressive." It appears they introduced comic matter or music to enliven them. As these curious productions had a great operation in moulding the tastes of the audiences who were subsequently to foster the modern drama, and in directing the genius of the great dramatic authors who laid the foundation of our national theatre, it may not be uninteresting to give, from Mr. Collier, a slight sketch of one of them:—

"The first play, or pageant, of the Widkirk Collection, includes 'The Creation, with the rebellion

and expulsion of Lucifer and his adherents.' The Deity thus commences :—

'Ego sum alpha et o ;
I am the first the last also,
Oone God in majestie,
Mervelus of myght most,
Fader and son and hooly goost,
On God in trinyte.'

"The work of creation is then begun, and, after the Cherubim have sung, the Deity descends from his throne and goes out; Lucifer usurps it, and asks the Angels—

'Gay felows how semys now me?'

The good and bad angels disagree as to his appearance; but the dispute is terminated by the return of the Deity, who expels Satan and his adherents from heaven. Adam and Eve are then created in Paradise, and this piece ends with a speech from Satan, lamenting their felicity. Of the temptation and fall of man we hear nothing, the second play relating to the murder of Abel. It is opened by Cain's ploughboy, called Garçon, with a sort of prologue, in which, among other things, he warns the spectators to be silent. Cain enters with a plough and team, one of his mares being named 'Donnyng;' he quarrels with the Garçon, because he will not drive for him, after which Abel arrives, and wishes that 'God may speed Cain and his man.' Cain replies, unceremoniously desiring his brother to kiss the honourable part of his person. The

murder afterwards takes place, and Cain hides himself:—

Deus. Cayn, Cayn !

Cayn. Who is that callis me ?

I am yonder, may thou not se.

Deus. Cayn, where is thy brother Abell ?

Cayn. What asks thou me ? I trow in hell ;

At hell I trow he be :

Whoso were ther then might he se !

Cain having been cursed, calls the boy and beats him, ‘but to use his hand :’ he acknowledges that he has slain his brother, and the boy advises running away, ‘lest the bayles us take.’ This is followed by some gross buffoonery, Cain making a mock proclamation ‘in the king’s name,’ and the boy repeating it blunderingly after him. Cain sends him away with the plough and horses, and ends the pageant with a speech to the spectators, bidding them farewell for ever before he goes to the devil.”

Rude and barbarous as this appears, it contains the germ of the elements that were subsequently to invigorate our magnificent and original drama. It will, however, be better to proceed with the progress of the drama, and hereafter to point out the effect these early efforts produced.

Miracle plays, which we have seen were certainly in full existence in Stephen’s time, seem to have increased in popularity until the reign of Henry VI., when a very important change took place in them by the introduction of a class of allegorical charac-

ters, whereas in the early miracle plays none but Scripture characters were personated. These allegorical, or symbolical characters were no doubt introduced to vary the sameness of the Scripture characters, which probably had been nearly exhausted by successive writers. Whatever may have been the motive for their introduction, we find them gradually creeping on the stage until they at last entirely usurped the place of their predecessors.

Mr. Collier defines a Morality as "a drama, the characters of which are allegorical, abstract, or symbolical, and the story of which is intended to convey a lesson for the better conduct of human life." They were acted on the same kind of stages as the miracle plays, and, like them, had many characters, considerable machinery, and numerous properties. 'The Castle of Perseverance,' one of the earliest representations of the kind, had 36 characters; amongst which were Mundus, Belial, Caro, Humanus, Gens, Stultitia, Voluptas, Detractio, Avaritia, Pœnitentia, Mors, &c. Two of the principal characters in all these performances were the Devil and the Vice, and both have been the subject of very minute research and dissertation by antiquarian commentators. They were the delight of the multitude, and seem to have been the Pantaloon and Clown of those days. The Vice for a long time teased and tormented the Devil, thrashing him with his dagger of lath, and doubtless singing his legs with hot pokers, and banging doors in his face, *à la*

Grimaldi, in a way that seems to be inherently pleasing in all ages, and is as mirth-cheering in this period of vaunted refinement as in the barbarous one of Edward IV. The Devil, however, in accordance with sound morality, ultimately bore off his persecutor to the place of his deserts, amidst the gibes and exultation of those who had enjoyed his sallies, but who were then, as now, perhaps, glad to compound for the sin of thus rejoicing with him by sanctioning his damnation.

The following titles of a few of these Moralities will be sufficient to give some idea of their purport:—‘Mind,’ ‘Will and Understanding,’ ‘Mankind,’ ‘Nature,’ ‘The World and the Child,’ ‘Every Man,’ ‘Interlude of Youth,’ &c.

The moral plays seem sooner to have undergone a change than the miracle, as we find they very soon manifested a tendency towards the personification of real life, and an inclination to forsake the generalization of allegory, and descend to an imitation of individual character. Another kind of performance, entitled Interludes, sprang from them, of which John Heywood is thought to be the inventor. These consisted of dialogues of a satirical and moral nature, such as ‘Whether riches were better than love,’ a ‘Contention between liberality and prodigality,’ &c.

We are now approaching the production of regular comedy and tragedy, as brought to perfection by Shakspeare and his contemporaries. As early as

the reign of Henry VII., the moral plays were interspersed with individual characters, and in the following reign we have undoubted proof that the idea of characterizing individual human beings had been fully developed, as the comedy of 'Ralph Roister Doister' proves. But because this is the first regular piece of the kind yet discovered, it by no means proves it was the first written, though it fully explodes a notion, long and ignorantly maintained, that 'Gammer Gurton's Needle' is the earliest regular drama in the English language. This error has been reiterated, until very lately, in books of great pretensions, although Mr. Collier's "History of Dramatic Poetry," published in 1831, proved the contrary; but a quotation from him, which was widely circulated, through the medium of the *Times* of last year, seems to have put an end to the repetition of this favourite blunder of many descanters on dramatic matters.

The sixteenth century is, perhaps, the most eventful history has ever recorded. The discoveries in the East and West—the progress of the Reformation—the rapid application of printing—gave an impetus to it that seems to have penetrated to all classes. A perfect rage for public exhibitions, the certain sign of an active age, appears to have seized the public mind. Miracle plays were still performed, as we may suppose, by those connected with the ancient ecclesiastical establishment. Moralities were also still in vogue, though their character was

gradually changing, by the intermixture of individual personifications. Interludes, as before said, were for a time the fashion ; but bore a short sway, being tedious and ill-calculated to attract the multitude. In addition to these, many novelties were rapidly introduced. The learned caught the mania of the period, and translations and paraphrases of the classics appeared. The French, Spanish, and Italian dramas and romances were ransacked. Our own histories were divided into scenes, and the historical play—a thing utterly unknown to the ancients, and purely *sui generis*—was produced. Never was such an age of revelry, masking, and public pleasure ; all classes engaged in it, the learned and the unlearned, rich and poor, high and low—opposite religionists enlisted it in their polemical disputes — opposite statesmen in their political. Numerous works issued from the press—abusing and defending—instructing or describing—opposing or upholding it. We find privy councillors and vagabonds, the heads of colleges, Roman Catholic and Protestant divines, knights, burgesses, and bishops, all pursuing the fashionable literature. Those who enacted it were equally multifarious. Regular stage players, mimes, mummers, unthrifths, choristers, ecclesiastics, guilds of artizans, gentlemen of the inns of court, collegians, apprentices, the servants of noblemen—in fact, all classes and conditions, partook of the furor, which seems to have lasted longer, and spread wider, than any other

fashionable rage yet recorded. This, however, was only the surging of the waves, out of whose mighty froth were to arise the geniuses destined to shed an imperishable glory on our stage and our literature.

CHAPTER III.

PROGRESS OF THE ROMANTIC DRAMA.

Rise of the English Drama—Chronology of Early Plays—
The Development of Shakspeare's Genius.

As it appears very difficult to give the reader who is unacquainted with the minutiae of the dramatic history of the sixteenth century, any adequate idea of the variety of its productions, and of the manner in which our national drama was formed, by an abridged narrative, it seems to be the simplest mode to select, in chronological order, the great leading events of the subject. In the following list no attempt is made to give a complete statement, but only such selections as shall give some idea of the progress of the drama, till the time it assumed a permanent shape—a period which can scarcely be placed earlier than 1600. The materials are to be found in the histories of Malone, Collier, &c., but are so overlaid with controversy and documents (necessary, perhaps, to give authority to those excellent writers), as to be very perplexing to the cur-

sory reader. It seems, however, ungracious to say even this, and no one caring either for the political or literary history of the period, should be without Mr. Collier's most excellent and elaborate "History of English Dramatic Poetry, and Annals of the Stage."

1504.—'The Nigramansir.' A moral play, by John Skelton.

1512.—'The Mysterie of Candlemas Day.' By John Pafre.

1517.—'The Nature of the Four Elements.' By John Rastall. An endeavour to make the stage a vehicle for scientific instruction.

1522.—'The Worlde and the Childe.' A morality.

1523.—Richard Edwards born.

1527.—'Whether Riches were better than Love.' A dialogue; played before the King.—Sackville, afterwards Lord Buckhurst and Earl of Dorset, born.

1530.—'Ralph Roister Doister.' By Nicholas Udall. A paraphrase of Latin comedy; the earliest hitherto discovered.—'The Bewte and good Properties of Women,' &c. An interlude from the Spanish.

1532.—'A Pageaunte.' By Udall and Leland. For Anne Boleyn's marriage.

1533.—'The Mery Playe between Johan the husband, Tyb, his wife, and Sir Johan, the Preest.' A kind of farce.

1540.—‘A Satyre of the three Estaitis.’ By Sir David Lindsay. A political interlude.

1543.—First act of parliament controlling stage representations.

1545.—The earliest known patent passed, creating a Master of the Revels, Plays, &c.

1549.—Stage playing prohibited as seditious.

1550.—‘King Johan.’ A play, in two parts, by John Bale, Bishop of Ossory. A political, polemical, historical morality.

1552.—Another proclamation against ‘Plaiers and Printers without Licence.’—Peele born.

1553.—Lyly born—Munday born.

1556.—Lodge born.

1557.—Chapman born.—‘A Mask of Almayns, Pilgrymes, and Irishemen,’ played before the Queen.

It would seem that from the death of Henry VIII. (1547) to that of Mary (1558), the government were inimical to theatrical, or rather stage, representations, as calculated to ferment the dissensions between the two churches. Soon after the accession of Elizabeth the restriction was removed, and the entertainment received a new impetus, and mostly a new form.

1559.—‘The Troas of Seneca.’ Translated by Jasper Heywood.

1560.—‘Misogonus.’ A comedy. Probably translated from the Italian.—Robert Greene born.

1561.—‘The Tragedy of Ferrex and Porrex.’ By T. Sackville, afterwards Earl of Dorset;

formed, as regards sentiments and diction, on the classical model. — ‘Cambyses.’ A mixture of history and allegory. By T. Preston.

1562.—Samuel Daniel born.

1563.—‘The Tragical-Comedy of Appius and Virginia.’ Probably the earliest extant English dramatic production, publicly represented, the plot of which is derived from history.

1564.—SHAKSPERE born.—Nash born. ‘Damon and Pythias. A tragi-comedie.’ By Richard Edwards.

1566.—‘Gammer Gurton’s Needle.’ By Bishop Still. A farcical comedy. — ‘The Supposes.’ Translated from ‘Ariosto,’ by Geo. Gascoigne. Remarkable as being in prose.

1568.—‘Tancred and Sigismunda.’ A tragedy.

1570.—The playhouse called ‘The Theater,’ in Shoreditch, built; supposed to be the first public building of the kind in England.—‘The Curtain,’ also near Shoreditch, erected very shortly after the foregoing.

1572.—An act passed against the numerous players who wandered over the country, who were declared to be “rogues and vagabonds,” unless they performed under the license of some nobleman, or of two justices of the peace.

1574.—Ben Jonson born.

1576.—‘The History of Error.’ A comedy.—The Blackfriars Theatre erected.—The Whitefriars ditto.—Fletcher born.—‘The Paynter’s Daughter,’

and eight other 'plaies, acted by the Lord Leicester's servants,' 'The Children of Powles,' &c., before the Queen, at Hampton Court.

1578. — 'A Mask.' By H. Goldingham. — 'Promos and Cassandra,' A play. By Geo. Whetstone. — 'Arden of Feversham. A domestic tragédie.' Supposed to have been played at this time, under the name of 'Murderous Michael,' before the Queen.

1580. — The Newington Butts Theatre erected. — George Peele supposed to have come to London from Oxford. — Lodge probably began writing for the stage. — 'The Famous Victories of Henry the Fifth,' on which Shakspeare's play was founded. Peele may be considered as one, if not the earliest, of that celebrated class of which Shakspeare was subsequently the greatest. In their dramas for the first time are found delicious poetry, passion, and character. Peele has the merit, as far as we can obtain information, of being the first to cast the drama into that poetic and philosophic shape it has since retained. His dramas have many defects and incongruities, but in them is to be found the divine energy of genius.

1581. — 'Seneca, his tenne Tragedies translated into English,' now collected and published in 4to.

1583. — Marlowe took his bachelor's degree at Cambridge. — 'Sir Philip Sidney's Apology of Poetry,' wherein he attacks the Romantic drama.

1584.—‘The Two Italian Gentlemen, or Fidele and Fortunatus.’ A comedy, by Munday.—‘An Antic Play,’ performed at Somerset Palace.—‘The Arraignment of Paris.’ A court show by Peele.—Massinger born.—‘Alexander and Campaspe.’ An historical play by Lyly.

1585.—The Rose and the Hope Theatres erected.

1586.—Blank verse probably first used on the public stage, in Marlowe’s ‘Tamburlaine.’—Ford born.—‘The Wounds of Civil War.’ An historical play, by Lodge. —Shakspeare probably in London and connected with the stage.—Beaumont born (as conjectured).

1587.—Thomas Nash left Cambridge and came to London.

1588.—‘The First Part of Jeronymo.’ By Kyd.—‘The Historie of Frier Bacon and Frier Bongay.’ By Greene.—The Paris Garden transformed into a theatre.

1589.—Shakspeare a joint proprietor of the Blackfriars theatre.—‘The Rare Triumph of Love and Fortune.’ A court entertainment. ‘A knack to Know a Knave;’ a mixture of comedy and morality.—‘The famous Chronick History of King Edward the First.’ By Peele.—Lyly had produced six plays, the exact dates of the appearance of which cannot be ascertained.

1590.—‘Antony. A tragedie.’ By the Countess of Pembroke, on the classical model.—‘Cornelia.’ A tragedy. Translated from the French.

1591.—‘The Troublesome Reign of King John.’ The foundation of Shakspeare’s.

1592.—Greene’s ‘Groat’s worth of Wit’ published, wherein he attacks Shakspeare, styling him a ‘Johannes Factotum.’—Greene died.—Chettle probably writing for the stage.—‘Summer’s Last Will and Testament.’ A show, by Nash, presented before the Queen.

1593.—‘The Troublesome Reign of King Leir.’ On which Shakspeare’s is founded.—Marlowe died.

1594.—The Globe Theatre built.—‘Cleopatra.’ By Daniel. On the classical model, with a preface reprobating the romantic.—Shirley born.

1595.—The Swan Theatre erected.—‘Old Fortunatus.’ By Dekker.

1596.—‘Ben Jonson’s Every Man in his Humour.’ His first acted play.—Thomas Heywood probably began writing for the stage.

1598.—Chapman probably began writing for the stage.—‘Virtuous Octavia.’ A tragedy on the classical model. By Samuel Brandon.—Mere’s ‘Wit’s Treasury’ published, wherein he enumerates twelve of Shakspeare’s plays.—Peele died.

1599.—The Fortune theatre erected.

Nothing can be more difficult to obtain than the exact dates of these remote theatrical events, and a due allowance must be therefore made. Many are only approximations, founded on very careful and laborious inquiry. Frequently the only date that can be given to a play is that of its being printed,

although that did not take place very often till some years after its production on the stage. Such as they are they will be some guide to the perplexing labyrinth of the history of the stage, and will serve as landmarks for the reader to trace the gradual progression and ultimate development of the Shaksperian drama.

The following authors had probably distinguished themselves as dramatists; and, perhaps, many others, in the latter part of the last decade of the sixteenth century:—Thomas Heywood, Drayton, Dekker, Haughton, Middleton, Rowley, Field, May, Davenport, Daborne, Marston, Webster, &c. The extraordinary dramatic prolificness of this period cannot be comprehended from the foregoing list, as only a few of the prominent circumstances indicative of the spirit and tendency of the period have been selected.

We have now traced the rise of the romantic drama, and have approached to the period when it received its full and perfect form, and are, therefore, now able to enter upon the examination of the qualities which so essentially divide it from the classical, a matter very necessary to be fully elucidated in any examination of the condition and prospects of the stage. Previous to so doing, however, a subject not absolutely necessary to the conduct of our subject, but intimately connected with it, namely, the period of Shakspeare's first appearance as a dramatist, is well deserving of attention.

Mr. Knight, in his 'Pictorial Shakspeare' (a work to which may be given the high praise that it is worthy of its subject), has started a new theory as to the date of Shakspeare's first play, and has supported his supposition with that mixture of critical acumen and practical sense that peculiarly distinguishes his commentary. He is for placing the earliest production in 1585, whilst Malone assigns 1589 in one place, and 1591 in another; Chalmers 1589; and Drake 1590, as the date. Mr. Collier thinks he came to London in 1586-7, was engaged in patching the historical plays of 'Henry the Sixth,' but did not produce any thing original till 1593. All this may appear very unimportant to the general reader, but it involves something more than a mere literary discussion, for it affects some portion of the fame of Shakspeare, and consequently the capacity of the human mind, by bringing in question whether he did not give the form and pressure of our drama, as well as carry it to its utmost possible height. If he wrote 'The Two Gentlemen of Verona' in 1585, he undoubtedly preceded Marlowe in putting blank verse on the public stage, and produced a more regular drama than had yet been seen. If he did not write until 1591, Peele, Greene, Marlowe, Lodge, and Nash, must be considered as the fathers of our legitimate drama of passion and character, and Shakspeare as the perfecter.

On Mr. Knight's side of the question lies probability, on the other some scattered facts and slender

inductions ; and, where nearly all is conjecture, no decisive result can be obtained. The one great fact that stands out an isolated landmark is, that Shakspeare was a not inconsiderable shareholder in the Blackfriars theatre (the Drury-lane of that time) in 1589. How came he so? He arrived poor in the metropolis to seek a living. He was certainly in his native place in 1584-5. He had become an actor, but it certainly was not for his acting he was thus received amongst the sharers.

We are thus driven into the conclusion that his writing must have procured him this distinction. What had he written is the next question that presents itself? Probably ORIGINAL plays, for the adaptation of the plays of others could scarcely be entrusted to the inexperienced hands of a young genius who had not manifested his knowledge of stage matters by any productions of his own. This kind of work would be jealously watched by the managers, and must ever have required great skill and experience. Shakspeare, mighty as he was, was human, and it is scarcely possible that a genius so ripe, so rich, so overflowing as his, should not have its enthusiasm kindled into an original production, and not by the mechanical botching of the inferior productions of others.

Mr. Knight asks what principle is overthrown by making him a great dramatic writer before he was twenty-six?—and answers, none. But a very great principle is overthrown, for, as before stated, it

would make him the founder of our regular romantic play, the introducer of blank verse, and consequently as greatly original as he was splendidly poetical.

Although it is with diffidence that any one should differ with Mr. Collier on matters to which he has devoted so much ability, so perseveringly, and with such unusual advantages, yet it would appear that his just admiration for Marlowe has run away a little with his usually cool judgment. He has certainly proved that he wrote 'Tamburlaine,' and also that it is a work of high genius; but not satisfied with that, he seems determined to prove that he gave the permanent mould to our drama by the introduction of blank verse. To do this, as the date of 'Tamburlaine' cannot be placed earlier than 1587, he comes to the conclusion "that Shakspeare had not written any of his original plays prior to 1593 (when Marlowe was killed), although, anterior to that year he might have employed himself in altering and improving for representation some of the works of the older dramatists." This adherence to the idea that a young poet should be employed in what he is in general the last to acquire, namely, a knowledge of stage craft, and experience as to what would please the popular humour, must appear absurd to all who are acquainted practically with the theatre. "Reading and writing" may "come by nature," but certainly not stage-managing. It also involves the improbability, that his extraordinary mind should

slumber until his 30th year, and then produce twelve or fourteen five-act plays in five years. Mr. Knight's supposition seems, after this, irresistible.

This, however, has its difficulties, and, perhaps, cannot be allowed to be carried out to the extent he seems to intimate, though it is not fair to judge of his theory until he has, as promised, more amply developed it in the biography. If conjecture may be allowed, and, unfortunately, we have nothing else as yet to enlighten us, Shakspeare, in common with all poets, was determined by some external circumstance to the particular expression of his poetical powers; and, probably, when very young, had written or sketched out two or three plays, with which he arrived in London, and which were moderately successful. Being also an actor, and certainly always a practical man, he became useful, and probably almost indispensable, to his theatre; this led to his partnership, and to his earning the title of "Factotum," which the loose-living Greene fixed on him in 1592.

The admirers of the older theory will say, and perhaps with appearance of justice, that this early connexion with the theatre at one or two-and-twenty deprives him of those occupations, and that practical and technical knowledge of business and mankind, which all his works show, and which not even his genius could have acquired without personal acquaintance with them. To this, however, it may be some answer that he, probably from his

station and his father's circumstances, was early, perhaps at fourteen, put out into the world, and we are certain such a genius would very rapidly acquire this kind of knowledge. The question, however, will, no doubt, hereafter receive minute consideration; and as it is rather an excrescence on the present subject, it need not now be further pursued; but, at the same time, whoever takes up the matter, will not be fitted for the discussion without the careful investigation of Knight's text, which is as near perfection as the extraordinary state of the immortal works will allow, and of which it is no less true than strange that it may be said the text of Homer does not present greater difficulties to his commentator. Steevens, and even Malone, give a fabricated text from the various and varying copies, but in Knight may be found all—the best in the body, and the remainder in the notes.

CHAPTER IV.

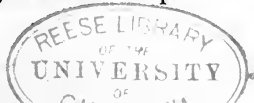
THE CLASSICAL AND THE ROMANTIC DRAMA
CONTRASTED.

Forms of Poetry temporary—Æschylus and Shakspeare—
The Classic and Romantic Forms—Elements of the Ro-
mantic—Requisites of the Romantic Form—Modern
Classical Drama—Theatrical Realization—The Nature of
Fiction.

THE Greek drama, as perfected by Euripides, and the English drama, as perfected by Shakspeare, can only be brought into juxta-position in order to test the justice of that species of criticism which insists upon trying the latter by a comparison with the former.

Many persons, deeply versed in classic literature, impressed as they justly are with the power and genius of those remote writers, claim for them an exclusive right to give to all time the form and mould in which the imagination shall express itself. And many scholars have been so deeply imbued with the ancient method, as to declare any other form "barbaric."

It belongs to genius of the highest class to impress



on the literature it adopts a form co-existent with its language and its nature. That it should do so is natural and obvious. The highest exertion of the intellect is to be universal; but the highest exertion yet exemplified has only been so in part. Job, David, Homer, Æschylus and Shakspeare, have been but so in the expression and application of human sentiments and sensations, and there is much in each of them that is purely national, and even individual. Indeed, without being so they would not have reached posterity, for they would not have interested the present.

Poetry, although it embraces the highest philosophic truth, does not express itself in abstract terms, but develops itself by an appeal to those inherent qualities that acknowledge truth by the spontaneous emotions of the soul; herein differing from science, which, passing by the will, appeals solely to the operation of the intellect. Poetry, therefore, is inclined to swerve from the general to the particular—from the universal to the individual—from the permanent to the temporary—from the natural to the conventional. To attempt, therefore, to thrust on one age and country the form and sentiment of another, is, in the language of Scott, to attempt “the cold resurrection of lifeless corpses which have long slumbered in the tomb of antiquity.” There will be in all high class poetry a similarity by the expression of passion and the combination of fancy, that may excite a desire to enforce a simila-

rity in less essential matters; and to this desire alone is to be attributed the perpetual endeavour of some æsthetical writers to compress the romantic into the classical form.

In Æschylus and in Shakspeare there is much that is similar, but more that is dissimilar. The same swelling passion, the same gorgeous diction, the same glowing and magnificent description drawn from strong observation and great sensibility. But then, where, amid the statuary groups of Æschylus, is to be found the landscape with which Shakspeare completed the representation, or the additional beings with which he gave to the imaginative world a life-like existence?

The classical advocate, impressed with the intensity of Æschylus, looks coldly on the living scenes of Shakspeare. Satisfied and filled with the glorious outpourings of the Greek, raised and sublimed by the glowing ardour of his language, he fixes him as the maximum of dramatic excellence, and denounces any departure from his form as barbaric. The lover of the romantic, on the contrary, accustomed to test the imitation by his observation of the existing world, is dissatisfied with the narrowness of the view, is overpowered with the monotonous grandeur of the chorus, and perhaps with the slow moving action that cumbrously, but powerfully, develops the sufferings of the few actors. The lover of the romantic drama misses the ever-varying shades of character and passion, the rapid succession of events,

the continued flow of emotion. He finds that the beings are above or beyond him, and at last becomes oppressed by woes with which he has little sympathy. Pity and terror are emotions which sooner exhaust than any other, and they are the chief emotions appealed to by the classical drama. Life, warm, vigorous, energetic life, in all its various forms, is the object of delineation with the romantic. Wafted from scene to scene by the magic power of the poet, the spectator makes no cold calculations on minute probabilities; he sees essential truth before him, and he asks not for particular. He is told, or he concludes, that the necessary connexion between the circumstances has occurred. Interested in the proceedings, he is impatient for the event, and is only irritated by the Aristotelian, who would delay them to tell him the necessary minutiae had transpired. Hamlet is discoursing sublimely on the topic most interesting to human nature, the worth and meaning of existence, and the modern spectator cares little how he comes before him; sufficient that he is there: enough has been told of his escape, and he is again before the audience floating in the full stream of passion and poetry.

This enthusiasm of the imagination may be barbaric, but it may be equally wise with the more logical enjoyment of the classical model, and the question here to be discussed is not which form is intrinsically the best, but which is most adapted for modern representation; nor is it, perhaps, even ne-

cessary to carry out the question thus far, but only to point out that there is no necessity to coerce the romantic into a classic mould. A very effective drama could no doubt be produced on the ancient model; and, indeed, we see something very closely approaching to it in the serious Italian opera. By 'Medea' we are interested, excited, and moved; when we rise from witnessing its performance, we have had some hours of delight, and without making any metaphysical inquiries of the source of our gratification, we have our ears thrilling with delicious music, and our souls filled with overpowering sensations. This would be sufficient of itself to show how little the exercise of the reason has to do with dramatic amusement or even illusion. If brought to the test of reality and fact, nothing can be further from them than this kind of opera, and yet it is not only an innocent but a rational amusement, for it helps to refine the taste and elevate the feelings.

The difference between the romantic and the classic drama is undoubtedly essential, but it by no means therefore happens that the latter is incompatible with modern amusement. That the former is the more national form is indeed apparent from its origin and progress, as will be acknowledged by an examination of its history as portrayed in the preceding chapter. The numerous elements of its composition are there displayed, and it will be observed that the classic itself had a considerable influence upon it. From the Miracle play it derived

the variety of its events, the number of its *dramatis personæ*, its grotesque pageantry, and the latitude of its events and proceedings; and, above all, it derived from these sacred representations that influence with its audience, which led them to surrender themselves to the poet's will, and be led whithersoever his fancy directed. Accustomed to the most rapid changes of persons and places, and to the exemplification of miraculous occurrences, they were not, like the classical audiences, in perpetual search of the real as related to the proceedings of the scene, but were implicitly bound to receive as fact all that the "maker" chose to impose on them. From the 'Moralities' the Shaksperian drama derived the abstraction of its characters into species, and its eloquent dissertation; from the 'Interludes' its long and vigorously sustained dialogue; from the 'Shows' and pantomimic representations its constant movement and life-like action; from the classical translation its more regular and condensed form, as also that individualisation of the abstraction of a species which the Moralities had engendered. It is not meant to assert that all these are visible in all the productions of the Shaksperian era, nor that individual genius did not greatly impress and mould its form. But it will be seen that during the sixteenth century these elements gradually unfolded themselves, and towards its close became mingled into one kind of drama. This form required the highest mental faculties for its full d.

velopment, and consequently we find it complete but in the production of one individual, though many portrayed more than one of its essential requisites in great perfection.

Fixed on this broad and magnificent basis, the romantic drama demands an intimate and profound knowledge of, and sympathy with, mankind, an exuberant fancy, a lofty and inexhaustible imagination, working on an observation various and incessant—eloquence, and the power of numbers, that can kindle and arouse the dullest—a judgment, delicate and vigorous, that can weave innumerable circumstances into one homogeneous mass, that shall have an enlarged and capacious unity: and to all these must be added that indefinable quality, usually denominated genius, that shall give a lively and imperishable interest to the whole.

With these requisites it will be allowed that, whether superior or inferior to the classical form as modernly exemplified, its production must be much more rare and difficult. A painful story, a fervent enthusiasm, and tolerable declamation, will furnish a modern classical drama that may draw more tears than ‘Hamlet’ or ‘Macbeth.’

To revive the actual classical drama has never been urged by its fondest admirers, for its sentiment and its principles are so opposed to modern notions, that much of what was formerly solemn would now appear absurd. The nearest approach to it have been some French and German plays (for Milton’s

‘ Agonistes,’ and Mason’s ‘ Caractacus,’ were never intended for performance), and in these, though the Greek form is scrupulously retained, even to the chorus, yet the sentiment and interest is modern. The Christian’s feelings are incompatible with the heathen’s, and having no faith in their gods nor their irreversible fate, we cannot be interested in the unmitigated and undeserved sufferings of an Orestes; we turn from it as a revolting injustice, and as we hope, so we continually solace ourselves with the knowledge, that the whole is impossible. We may admire the skill of the poet, and the beauty of the poem, but the living dramatic interest escapes us. The most that the moderns can do, or have done, is to apply some of the Aristotelian rules, as derived from the great Greek dramatists, to our theatres, and these are chiefly the unities of time, place, and action, which are thought to give reality to the representation. The ancients appear to have adhered to them pretty closely (though by no means absolutely), because the construction of their drama, with its simple fable and religious chorus, required little or no departure from them. In their drama, a few actors, engaged in the depiction of some single transaction, merely elaborate the feelings connected with it, intensely and beautifully, but not discursively; they are bound by the singleness of the proceeding, and hemmed in by the chorus. Modern critics, however, a class always more celebrated for their logical than their imaginative

powers, have been for reducing every thing to reality: they triumphantly announce *realization* to be the end and object of the imitative arts, and more particularly of the drama. Having assumed this solecism, and almost without contradiction, they proceeded to enforce the unities, and issued their decrees against all the great masters of the romantic school, as savages and barbarians, whom no men of taste were to admire, much less imitate. By this law, Rymer and Voltaire adjudged Shakspeare to be a blood-thirsty barbarian, and Mulgrave outlawed him as a noble monster, at the same time condescendingly regretting that he had not been cast on more civilized times. The rest of the romantic school were contemptible vagabonds, good for nothing but to be plundered by their classical betters, who would pick from them the few gems they possessed, and consign the refuse to that large literary dunghill called oblivion.

As this race of critics is not quite extinct, it may be necessary to endeavour to refute their leading error, that actual realization is the object of the drama. That it is not, many of them feel, for they cannot make ghosts and fairies real; they cannot reconcile the success of plays full of solecisms; they think reality should please, but they see prize-fighters driven from the stage, real elephants hissed, and mock ones applauded, and they are bewildered; they build theory on theory, denounce vengeance on vengeance, with Aristotle in one

hand and Horace in the other, and do every thing but think it possible for themselves to err.

Had these gentlemen pleased to have observed the progress of any play, however closely adhering to their own rule, they would have found much that was not real, though it might be made to appear so; they would find that the closest approximation to fact leaves much undepicted, and they would have found that there is an aptitude and readiness in the mind to make large suppositions from small suggestions, to take a part for the whole, to tell all a story that is only half uttered, to carelessly omit much that is absolutely necessary, and to make an apparent whole out of prominent parts. They would also find that a selected portion of a series of facts would create a much greater sensation than the actual pourtrayal of them all. The reading of any novel, or the speech of any advocate, might have convinced them of all this; or even the page of a history, or the report of a police-office. In all the imaginative arts it is not the actual depicting, but the appearance of reality, that affects us. When Roderigo and Iago stand in a street in Venice (the very street itself in that city being almost a falsity), we do not hiss them because they tell their secrets in the public pathway; we do not call to them that they are committing an absurdity, but we plunge at once into their story; we merge the smaller facts into the more important; we see a villain cheating his dupe, and the intellectual interest catches hold

of us. The livelier the imagination and the nimbler the apprehension of the spectator, the more efficient, of course, is the impression of the representation. But were all the facts that make up an event elaborately displayed to a Bœotian mind, it would not derive one iota more apprehension of the proceeding.

It may be doubted if the most sober mind takes cognizance of all the facts of an event that actually passes before it, but whether it does not in the world, as in the theatre, miss a great deal, take much for granted, and only observe the most striking and salient points. The fallacies of philosophy, the cheats of experienced jugglers, would go far to prove that so far from its being natural to know all the facts of a case, it is almost impossible to prevent the mind from rushing to conclusions at a railroad pace.

In the theatre it is certain that the mind is in this state, and it requires but little skill to carry it on from incident to incident with a very considerable violation of the laws of probability. If a mind is incapable of having its imagination ignited, and its emotions excited, it will soon turn from the theatre as a mockery it cannot understand; and renounce it altogether, like the unimaginative lady who reproved her niece for reading "such a parcel of *falsehoods* as the *Waverley* novels."

The promoters of the unities have thus started on a wrong principle; they have thought the nearer they approached to reality, the nearer they came to

perfect illusion ; never considering that if they had carried their proposition fully out, they would have found they had worked out a fact, and had got to a reality, and not to the appearance of one. They did not perceive that illusion depends on the excitement of the imagination, and not on the arousing the senses and the judgment. Nor did they perceive that a partial appearance of reality, slightly exaggerated, was the best way to excite the imagination.

CHAPTER V.

THE MODERN CLASSICAL AND ROMANTIC
FORMS COMPARED.

Unity of Action—The Sham-classical Drama—The Logical School of Poetry—The Despotism of Criticism—Revival of the Imaginative School—Shakspeare amended—Shakspeare's Rejection of the Classical Rules.

THE unities of time and place have been disposed of in what has been said of attempting actual realization on the stage; and none but the most rigid of the classical advocates demand a very absolute exercise of them, the ancients themselves making them subservient to the circumstances of the fable. The unity of action, however, is still held as a strong fort in the classical region, and from it the chief attacks are made on the romantic school. A rigid adherence to it, indeed, gives an essential principle to the drama, and forms as marked a distinction between the two styles, as can well be imagined.

By the unity of the action the story is intended to be confined to one deep channel, and made to elicit strong and decisive effects, and thus to evolve a series of situations rather than a series of events.

Those who prefer this kind of construction to the more discursive form of the romantic, will, however, generally be found to be those who have cultivated what may be termed a logical exercise of the imagination. They still harp upon the real; they are for measuring every thing pourtrayed by their standard of the probable; they demand that the drama shall be a strict copying—not an imitation of existence; not a new world created by the poet, where the beings are amenable to the decrees of the imagination, but not to the by-laws of actual existence. With such there is a deficiency of imagination, and, consequently, of sensibility towards universal existence. Their tastes are for the most part conventional, and they have erected in their intellect certain standards whereby all things are measured. These standards are generally false, or if not intrinsically so, are rendered such in their application, by the exaggerated position they occupy in the minds of their owners. All variations from these standards are deemed absurd or low, and, consequently, these epithets abound in the works of the critics after the restoration, and of the French school, towards Shakspeare and the whole of the romantic dramatists.

A great portion of the arrogance of these critics arises from the insensibility of their natures, as well as the poverty of their imaginations. Imbued with exaggerated notions of the value of certain distinctions, and with a sensual notion of the beautiful, they disregard all that is not coarsely obvious and striking.

To such the 'Winter's Tale' is twaddle, and the 'Midsummer Night's Dream' nonsense; whilst 'Cato' and the 'Siege of Damascus' are perfection. In these there is no trifling about common hedge flowers; princesses are not put on a par with peasant girls; there are no horrible anachronisms about Dukes of Athens, but all is dignified and correct; the unity of action is maintained, as well as the dignity of manners and language; and if they produce little effect, it is because the audience is sunk in a beastly state of nature that prefers the irregular barbarisms arising from a larger and more extensive sympathy with nature and mankind.

The character of the promoters and introducers of this kind of drama will fully substantiate these assertions. By the domination of the religious fanatics of the 17th century, the romantic English drama was destroyed; and from 1648, there was a complete cessation of the legitimate drama of passion, character, and poetry. This drama was not revived, but the theatre was patronised by Charles the Second, and the sensual rout that formed his court. The manners of the courtiers and gentry connected with the town had also undergone a great change for the worse. A tawdry magnificence supplied the place of a real love for the fine arts; a coarse sensuality, the chivalrous gallantry of their fathers; and a low cunning, the discursive philosophy of the former period. The standard of honour and morality thus low, the tastes were on a par with them.

By such persons was the modern classic form introduced into this country filtered through the base models of the French school. Then Mulgrave gained credit as a poet for saying—

“ The unities of action, time, and place,
Which, if observed, give plays so great a grace.”

Then Lansdowne honoured the burgess Shakspeare by putting ‘The Jew of Venice’ into a readable shape, the original author becomingly acknowledging, in the prologue, his obligations to his lordship :

“ These scenes in their rough native dress were mine ;
But now improved, with nobler lustre shine :
The *first rude sketches* Shakspeare’s pencil drew,
But all the shining master-strokes are new.
This play, ye critics, should your fury stand,
Adorn’d and rescu’d by a faultless hand.”

The same kind of condescension was extended by the Duke of Buckingham to ‘Julius Cæsar’ and the ‘Chances;’ by Mr. Waller to Beaumont and Fletcher’s ‘Maid’s Tragedy;’ by Mr. Tate to ‘Lear’ and ‘King Richard the Second;’ by Mr. Otway to ‘Romeo and Juliet;’ by Mr. Dryden and Sir W. D’Avenant to the ‘Tempest,’ ‘Troilus and Cressida,’ and ‘Antony and Cleopatra;’ and by Mr. Crowne, to ‘Timon of Athens.’ ‘Macbeth’ was rendered endurable by turning it into an opera, which it still continues to be; and ‘Richard the Third’ is still considered the best telling play on the boards, being rendered, about the same period, by the genius of

Mr. Cibber, a cento of its author's productions run into a rising climax of rant, for the benefit of the principal ranter of the day.

Strange fickleness of human nature, that these considerate alterations, after having been duly appreciated for more than a hundred and forty years, should now again begin to be set aside for their musty originals, although Thomson's 'Coriolanus' still lingers in the mouth of one who claims to be the most daring of stage-reformers — one who, "alarmed at the sound himself had made," dared not to touch the operative part of 'Macbeth,' or boldly give the chronicle 'History of Henry V.' as it came from the hands of him whom all call "the great magician," but in whose skill and power none have the courage to fully confide.

The age of Charles the Second was not an imaginative one. Indeed, from the time of the Restoration to the breaking out of the French Revolution, a logical cultivation of the faculties and exercise of the imagination prevailed. The Reformation in the fifteenth century produced a greater mental development than any event of modern history. The impulse thus given, not only to the intellect but the feelings and passions of mankind, produced an age of the noblest imagination—a spirit of enterprise the most daring—a standard of intellectual excellence the most lofty. The spirit of chivalry and honour had not departed from the public mind. Renown was not then esteemed as a means but an

end. Commerce even was more nobly allied, and enterprise and honour were associated with her. Poetry had still rendered to it the reverence due to the teacher and the prophet; but the impulse thus communicated to the noblest qualities of our nature gradually died away. Legislation and the current of events were directed to tame men into peaceable and subservient citizens. The religious contest, latterly absorbing all the intellect of the period, tended to the exclusive cultivation of the reasoning faculties. Subtle analytical controversy was the mode of its exemplification, and as it is one of our peculiar qualities to rush into extremes, all that could not be brought into the compass of a diagram, or be analysed in the crucible of the logical reasoner, fell into contempt. Customs and manners are the great preservers of sentiments, but these also now underwent a complete alteration; the fanatical in religion thought it pious not only to destroy and uproot all remnants of the Roman Catholic religion, but indulged in the insane desire to destroy all that was even co-existent with it. They cut off their hair because Papists wore it long: they would have pulled down cathedrals because Papists had prayed in them: they forsook their national games because Papists had practised them. The tastes of the gentry had altered also: the excitement of the civil wars had raised a spirit of ambition and love of more extensive notoriety in the country gentlemen. Political intrigue had lowered the standard of mora-

lity ; and the progress of legislation and the physical sciences had reduced or destroyed all chivalric feeling. The empire of the passions and the imagination were abrogated, and that of selfishness and logic substituted.

The despotism of a narrow criticism may now be said to have commenced. Every thing was to be submitted to the test of reality ; and the products of the imagination were not to be excepted. A standard of perfection, graduated by the precepts of Aristotle, was erected, and by this Procrustean model the poet was to be tested. The profligate but witty court lent its patronage to that exercise of the intellect which more affected the understanding than the feelings. The learned supported it by their authority ; and the audience applauded it, because it accorded with their low standard of philosophy and sentiment.

Newton is said to have asked, " What the *Iliad* proved ? " and though this is a joke, it is sufficient to indicate the temper and taste of the period. Dryden, Roscommon, Mulgrave, and all the leading literati were continually asking the question in their critical essays, by inference, if not by words ; and the alterations of our romantic drama already alluded to, are a sufficient proof of the principle which guided them. This tyrannical usurpation of the logical school existed (it could never be said to flourish) until the end of the last century, when symptoms of an intellectual revolt took place, which,

beginning in the long-continued and yet unfinished commentary on Shakspeare's plays, gradually developed itself under the freedom which the out-breaking of the French Revolution gave to all discussions, both literary and political. From this date the drama of passion and imagination has been struggling into existence again; and would have much sooner manifested itself, had not the law, embodying the prejudice of an age, opposed its efforts.

Although the destruction of a sceptical philosophy, and the consequent elevation of the standard of morality, has done much to purify the general taste in the last thirty years, yet the evil effects of a long period of debasing influences and laws are still apparent. We are still affected by the excellence of some of the works produced in the logical school; and are somewhat overpowered by the long-continued arrogance and dogmatism of its critics. The comparative easiness, also, of producing some kind of effect in this mode of expression, leads mediocre minds and moderate abilities to adopt and defend it.

The unity of the action is still considered as one of the necessary principles of a correct drama by very respectable authorities, who have abandoned those of time and place. Their arguments, however, when traced to their result, generally mean unity of interest. They only demand a unity of the action, because they deem it necessary to a unity of the interest.

To test the effect of adhering to a strict unity of action, let us see what the play of 'Othello' would be if cast in that mode. The whole of the first act would (as suggested by Johnson) have been narrated; how much this would have tended to increase the intensity of the interest, every one will judge for himself. The second act would have been cut to one scene; indeed it interrupts "the intensity" in any way, and another batch of narrative, telling how Cassio had disgraced himself, and been cashiered, would have been better. The third act need only include the working up of Othello's jealousy, and all the filagree work indirectly developing the story, should be hewn away. The fourth act is a series of incidents sadly detracting from the main action, and barbarously protracting the interest; which, however, could be put aside for some good sound broad declamation. The fifth act would make one good scene, and, by the aid of a little homely and explanatory description in the mouth of Emilia, instead of all the characteristic vulgarity that is so injudiciously put into the mouth of a subordinate personage, we might come at once to the murder, which, for the sake of decency, should be off the scene, as also should Othello's suicide. After all, it would be very inartificial, and therefore should never have been written. 'Macbeth,' 'Hamlet,' and 'Lear,' are equally unmanageable, and they must be irremediably faulty, as it is impossible for critics to be wrong who are guided by a work on taste, written,

upwards of two thousand years since, for a nation whose language is dead, whose religion is exploded, whose race is extinct, and whose manners and habits are only imperfectly conjectured.

That Shakspeare rejected the unities on principle is certain; for the discussion as to their application to the English theatre had begun long before he began to write for the stage, and he could not be ignorant of the work of Sir Philip Sidney, nor of the dramas of his contemporaries on the classic model. Had he adopted it, though he would, doubtless, have produced something infinitely superior to any of the kind by a modern, we must have been deprived of an almost miraculous explication and unfolding of human nature, ill supplied by the most glorious declamations. We should have lost the visible delineation of the modern and christian character, and the Teutonic nations would not have had a voice for their vast and various characteristics.

Reference has not been made to the diction or sentiments used by the writers of the modern, or, as it ought really to be called, the sham-classical drama, as that subject connects itself more naturally with the subject of language, as employed by the dramatists. In conclusion it may be safely said, that we have not had one great play that keeps its hold either on the reader or the audience, composed on the modern classical model, whilst our noble masterpieces all take the romantic form.

CHAPTER VI.

STATE OF THE ENGLISH STAGE—THE
METROPOLITAN DRAMA.

Surrey Theatre—The Victoria Theatre—Astley's Amphitheatre—Adelphi Theatre—The English Opera House—The Strand Theatre—The Olympic Theatre—The Queen's Theatre—The City of London Theatre—The Pavilion Theatre—The Garrick Theatre—Sadler's Wells—The Haymarket Theatre—The St. James's Theatre.

LONDON, which extends its intellectual, if not its topographical identity from Bethnal-green to Turnham-green (ten miles); from Kentish-town to Brixton (seven miles); whose houses are said to number upwards of 200,000, and to occupy 20 square miles of ground, has a population of little less than two millions of souls, or rather mouths. Its leviathan body is composed of nearly 10,000 streets, lanes, alleys, squares, places, terraces, &c. It consumes upwards of 4,360,000lbs. of animal food weekly, which is washed down by 1,400,000 barrels of porter annually, exclusive of other liquids. Its rental is at least £7,000,000 a-year, and it pays for the luxuries it imports at least £12,000,000 per annum,

duty alone. It has 237 churches, 207 Dissenting places of worship, and upwards of 5,000 public-houses, and 16 theatres.

It is with the latter alone, and the examination of their performances, that our business lies. Eight of them stand within ten minutes' walk of each other, on one side of the river; three on the other side, within five minutes; and the remaining five cast a dim enlightenment on the more unknown and barbarous regions of the metropolis.

We will begin with the minor, following the epicure's philosophical maxim of "eat your best first, because then you are always eating your best."

The SURREY THEATRE has established, by its constancy to one class of sentiment and spectacle, a kind of standard, whereby may be represented certain dramatic performances, and "a regular Surrey piece" is the stereotyped phrase for a drama which, in three acts, portrays the heroism of watermen below, and the constancy of housemaids above bridge; wherein characters, the most heavenly, are continually coming in contact with characters very much the reverse; where the British navy is in every other sentence declared to be the only perfection exemplified on earth (if such an Irishism can be permitted), and where the language is alone equalled by the loftiness of the sentiment and the refinement of the wit. It is not meant to assert that an occasional "change does not come o'er the spirit of the scene," and that pieces of "a high and moral cast,"

adorned with all the learning of "Lyson's Environs of London," are not occasionally produced; when, to meet the great occasion, a big-wig from one of the leviathan legitimates is induced to emerge from his constellation, and, in solitary grandeur, to culminate in St. George's-fields, spreading horror and dismay to rival theatric thrones. Such was the solemn transit of Mr. Cooper to pourtray the dismal doom of Doctor Dodd; wherein was uttered from Dr. Johnson's solemn and capacious mind the original consolation and information in the following characteristic phraseology: "You know, Doctor Dodd, we must all die;" whereupon the worthy philosopher takes snuff, the bell tolls, and exit to the "Dead March in Saul."

The VICTORIA THEATRE has, perhaps, suffered more vicissitudes than any other. Its performances have been of every kind, and of every quality. Melodramas of the deepest dye and coarsest texture were once its staple commodity—when Turpin cut his horse's throat upon the stage, and the fact was "realized" by a quantity of red ochre. Here Kean has performed; as also his imitator, Junius Brutus Booth; and Mr. Sheridan Knowles, in some of his own refined and genuine plays. Vestris's genteel (there is no other term for them) company have exchanged the courtly audience of the Olympic, for the porter-drinking one of this theatre. Here Mr. Serle ("the gentleman of acknowledged talent," latterly employed as solemn censor to the works of the lite-

ration of the day for Covent-garden Theatre) used to combat with Mr. Martin's "tame wild beasts"—the small Van Amburgh of his day. It has been every thing by turns, but nothing long—ever aiming at novelty, but never pursuing any course sufficiently steadily to raise a character or secure a continuous and respectable audience. In its attempt towards performing the legitimate drama, it only pursued the system of having one popular actor in the principal character, and in that it was stopped by the larger "dogs-in-the-manger," the patent managers. Situated in one of the worst neighbourhoods, its audiences are of the lowest kind, and if the English Emperor or Empress should visit it, it would be necessary to imitate the Roman potentate, by drenching the audience with rose-water to neutralize certain vile odours arising from gin and tobacco, and bad ventilation. But even here is "food for philosophy;" and the universality of the power of dramatic genius, and the natural force of the mind and heart, is demonstrated by the attention and justice with which certainly one of the most uneducated audiences appreciate genuine pathos, and even genuine wit and poetry.

ASTLEY'S AMPHITHEATRE is a name at which the youthful heart bounds, and the olden one revives. Jeremy Bentham pronounced it to be the genuine English theatre, where John Bull, whatever superior tastes he might ape, was most sincerely at home. Here there is, at all events, no humbug

about legitimate drama ; it openly proclaims in its classic bills, "Historical panoply, and the glorious emblazonment of deeds of chivalry and skill," to be "the noblest aim of the dramatic muse;" it portrays, as the acme of dramatic perfection, "the Olympian revels at Babylon, where the Egyptian colossi frown at us from three thousand ages," and we see "the vast shades of Semiramis and Osiris, called from pyramidal slumbers by the gorgeous wand" of Mr. Ducrow. Here we have the gauntlet thrown down for spectacle, and it is said and sincerely believed, to be the one great thing. Long may the fool's legs be lashed by the elegant Mr. Widdicombe in the saw-dust circle, and long may it elicit roars of merriment from children of large and small growth. This theatre is what it pretends to be—a place of amusement, and as such is respectably conducted and respectably attended.

We will now cross the water, and step into the "great minor," on the opposite bank of Old Father Thames—the ADELPHI THEATRE, where melodrama, with all her woes, maintains her empire. Here the wild and wonderful, amidst blue fire and sinking traps, give a terrible warning to the murderer and the felon; here "horrors upon horror's head" are accumulated, and "intense interest and excited feelings" are enkindled by the continued casting of children out of the flies on to featherbeds in the cellars; by agonised partings and melting meet-

ings; by frenzied fathers, mad daughters, and remorseful wives. Here also are sure to be first introduced any foreign rarities, whether brute or human; here Ma'mselle D'Jeck (not a human ma'mselle) made her elephantine curtesy to a British public; here the mysterious Bayadères displayed their fine forms, animated by religious frenzy; here the dogs and cats "imitated humanity most abominably;" here Jim Crow danced his celebrated melody; and here again is to be seen a gentleman elephant, whom the worthy manager informs us, "surpasses in genius the celebrated Ma'mselle D'Jeck, so long the favourite of a discerning public." But let justice be done. The talent of Mrs. Yates, the genius of O. Smith, have occasionally irradiated the place with some gleams of intellect; and if spectacle has been the staple commodity, it has been more cleverly managed than at any other theatre, not excepting "the legitimate rivals," who have basely and bunglingly imitated and pirated its talent in this way.

THE ENGLISH OPERA-HOUSE should now change its name, for at the *Concerts à la Musard* any thing but English music is performed. "An enlightened British public" are beginning to acknowledge that a thing is not essentially vile because it is foreign, and it is an unfortunate fact for the national vanity, that foreign music is more pleasing than English. The attempts at the drama latterly made here have

been the convulsive throes of a decaying management, and it is to be hoped no more such agonies of the dramatic muse will be exhibited.

The little theatre in the Strand, or, to be more precise, the STRAND THEATRE, is a kind of pocket-house, where all is in proportion. It is noticeable as a pleasing proof of the force of talent of any kind; which, in spite of the bullying threats of the leviathans and the strong rivalry of the neighbourhood, contrived to create for itself a name with the public. Without the aid of large capital, without an army of supernumeraries, without the assumption of having high intellect, without the aid of a clique, this little ill-built, and, at one time, despised theatre has drawn some very good audiences, who have departed well pleased with its tiny spectacles, its humorous burlesques, its spirited actors. It exists, a strong argument for permitting the same freedom to the drama as to all other arts and professions.

The OLYMPIC THEATRE, silent and desolate, mourns in solemn darkness its mistress's departure. Here for seven years the genius of gentility presided. The laws of the drawing-room were transferred to the stage; nothing that could weary, nothing that could too rudely excite, nothing that could bore the visitors, was to be permitted. Trifle and ices, champagne and rout-cakes, were the perpetual fare. One-act farces, light, rapid, and sparkling, satirising solecisms in gentility and violations of elegance; two-act vaudevilles, with French sentiment and

Spanish intrigue; mythological and semi-poetical pieces, adapted to the display of voluptuous forms and captivating action, were its stock productions. If the rigid censor might affirm it had too much of the fascination of the seraglio, let him look in the faces of "the invincibles" and he would forget, not only their foibles, but his own virtues.

The QUEEN'S THEATRE (not the Italian Opera), in Tottenham Court-road, seems at humble distance to follow the preceding, and its fair manageress or supporter is generally some fascinating beauty, whom an admiring "friend" enables thus to show the town her talents and his taste. Inferior to the presiding Aspasia of the Olympic, the productions have been in like ratio; and consequently more evanescent, making it difficult to fix the characteristics of its performances. In the first few months of 1833, it produced more successful pieces than any other theatre was ever known to do—pieces since transferred to a permanent existence on various other stages; and as the Strand is a memento of the advantages of a freedom of stage performances, so this may be cited as a remarkable proof of the withering influence of monopoly; for here, under the auspices of a set of young and vigorous writers, might the legitimate drama have found a soil wherein to have struck new shoots, and have produced new blossoms, but the law forbade, and original talent was driven to find success, as it most amply did, in other channels of literature.

Though now in a large neighbourhood we have many miles to travel to our next theatre, and we must avail ourselves of an omnibus to arrive at the CITY OF LONDON THEATRE, in Shoreditch. Here melodrama prevails—of the domestic kind, if the condemned cell can be called so; at all events its audience seem very much at home at the realisation of the Newgate calendar. The managers plead that “as the schoolmaster is abroad,” they will kindly supply his place, and give historical lectures from the stage, instead of spouting poetry, or enacting passion; and consequently, ‘Jack Sheppard’ appears in fetters of the exact fashion he wore, no pains are spared to copy the dresses of the Greenwich and Chelsea pensioners, and other *recherche* means are taken to give the costume of the time from Hogarth’s prints and the Ladies’ Magazine.

The PAVILION THEATRE at Mile-end also devotes itself to the exciting form of melodrama. Here the Newgate calendar and tales of terror stand in the same place as Homer did to the ancient dramatists. Life, as it is emphatically said in this neighbourhood, is the chief thing to be portrayed, and therefore the deepest atrocities, the most squalid miseries, the most revolting adventures are delineated. The lives of gamblers, murderers, gaol-breakers are portrayed with a defiance of the unities that will even satisfy ourselves, and with a “realisation” that the patent theatres envy.

The GARRICK THEATRE seems to have its chief

recommendation in its name. Eight years ago Mr. Elton proved the advantage of a theatre where telescopes are not needed, by a very forcible and pure reading of *Sir Giles* on this primitive-sized stage. At present it is to be regretted that the law cannot put a stop to that most suicidal of all theatrical proceedings, the making the stage the medium of outraging the feelings of a class. All connected with the theatres, as well as the public, should join in stopping performances like 'The Gold Dust Robbery;' such conduct being at once painful to many innocent persons, and also a villainous pandering to the prejudices of the brutal and the unthinking towards a portion of their fellow-countrymen, too long oppressed by a narrow legislation.

In our haste to take our round we passed a very celebrated minor, "SADLER'S WELLS." This was from no disrespect, for although the Naiads and the Nereides, as well as the Grimaldis and the Cartliches, have forsaken the classic shores of the New River, still it is one of the magnums of the minors. Its sensible manager has collected a very superior company; and although occasionally robbers, both foreign and domestic, are the heroes of the pieces, yet even the regular drama of passion and poetry has been played here in a way pleasing to those who think there are other characters in 'Othello' and 'A New Way to Pay Old Debts' besides the noble Moor and Sir Giles; poor old-fashioned critics, who do not think the perpetual spouting of one individual

a compensation for the omission of the poetry, humour, and character of the remainder of the *dramatis personæ* ; who desire to see an author's meaning equally pourtrayed, and who prefer the play should make an impression, rather than one "robustious perriwig-pated fellow," who tears not only his own, but everybody else's speeches to rags.

The HAYMARKET THEATRE will, we fear, like a young lady on the borders of fashionable life, be indignant if not classed with the majors ; however, as it has no patent, and is itself an encroachment on those sacred documents, we shall proceed to characterise it. Under its present management it is prosperous, and deservedly so ; its lessee being a man of business, who, though he may have no Quixotic ambition as to the drama, knows how to cater very spiritedly to the taste of his audience. At present it seems to flourish by the appearance of a succession of favourite actors, who, when very popular, are, in theatrical parlance, called stars ; though it must be confessed that some of only a fourth or fifth magnitude, and scarcely fit to figure out of a constellation, have been called to shed but a tiny lustre on the scene. Whether the great tragic stars, or the great comic ones, are best adapted to this theatre, is a mooted point. Some might, in warm weather, prefer 'Love, Law, and Physic,' 'Paul Pry' and Liston, to 'Shylock,' 'Norman,' and Macready ; but *chacun à son gout*, we will return to our mutton, giving all honour to the worthy

manager, who might well be called the great magician of the day, from his power of commanding "the wandering stars."

The ST. JAMES'S had nearly escaped our recollection ; but of it there is little to be said, it being yet in its infancy, and that not a very pleasing one. Small vaudevilles and exploded operas were its chief performances while open, and doubtless its veteran proprietor wishes he had adhered to his once strongly expressed abhorrence of stage-managing. At present it is to be got rid of at any rate, and a painted board tells us, " This house is to be let furnished or unfurnished."

We have now made our weary round ; for the ITALIAN OPERA comes not within our subject. *Sui generis*, it stands apart from all other theatres, and may almost be said to be a private house, being chiefly supported by its annual subscribers. Long may it be so, and no theatre can justly complain of it, for it alone has rigidly adhered to its own class of performances, without alternately pilfering and being pilfered by its neighbours ; though indeed the latter it has not escaped, for the " legitimates" have been so far consistent as even to rob its ballets for spectacles, thus allowing nothing to escape their " activity."

From the dramatic tendency of the age there are numerous concert-rooms ready to burst into theatres, but they are repressed by the law. Bagnigge Wells is bid to restrain her saucy pretensions ; the Eagle

is chained down in his daring flight; and White Conduit House is obliged to exhaust its exuberant dramatic propensities in comic songs and country-dances. It is sadly to be feared that the enormity of vaudevilles is practised at some of these places: that one-act farces have been compressed into one-scene farces; that melodrames have been emasculated into small burlettas; and that even on one occasion imitations were given of the principal tragedians—which so far from being punished, should have been rewarded as a remarkable discovery, the race being apparently extinct. All these irregularities, however, can be put down next parliament on the petition of the “legitimates,” who, it is said, have already succeeded in driving Punch from the streets.

Such is the state of the minor drama in the City proudly pronounced to be “*universi orbis terrarum emporium*.”

CHAPTER VII.

THE PRESENT STATE OF THE ENGLISH STAGE.
—METROPOLITAN DRAMA CONTINUED.

Drury Lane Theatre—Covent Garden Theatre—Privileges of the Patent Theatres—Patent Performances at Drury Lane—Miss O'Neil—Privileged Performances at Covent Garden—Mr. Macready's Management—Vestris's Management.

THE Theatres-Royal, Drury-lane and Covent-garden, are two very superb buildings, protected by exclusive and arbitrary privileges, for the sole performance of a splendid drama, such as English literature alone possesses.

The theatre in DRURY-LANE, takes precedence in rank, on account of its being the house at which the king's servants performed at the time of granting the exclusive patents by the merry monarch, whose sport, like that of the mischievous boys to the frogs, was death to the drama, though fun to himself and the patentees. The outside is nearly as plain as a pikestaff, but the inside is very superb. The visitor to the boxes enters a very handsome rotunda, whence, ascending an elegant staircase, he gains the interior of the house. This presents about three quarters of

a circle, and has an imposing effect, being lighted from the ceiling by a superb chandelier, and arranged into three tiers of boxes, a spacious pit, and extensive galleries. The diameter of the house is fifty-three feet, the height to the ceiling fifty, and the distance from the curtain to the centre box, sixty-one feet. Three thousand six hundred people can easily be seated in it, and upwards of four thousand have been at one time within its walls.

COVENT GARDEN THEATRE is a finer building, and has more architectural pretension, being designed after the Temple of Minerva at Athens. It is not quite so large as Drury-lane, and is intended to accommodate about 3,000 persons, though 500 more than that number have paid at its doors.

Both these theatres have, in one respect, acted with extraordinary candour, Shakspeare being put outside Drury-lane, and the Muses of Tragedy and Comedy suffering the same exclusion at Covent-garden, thereby boldly and openly signifying that they do not want to have any thing to do with them within. Hundreds of thousands of pounds have been expended in the erection of these splendid buildings; every thing that could attract the eye, or dazzle it, has been effected. Machinery the most complicated is employed in the business of the stage; innumerable passages aid the adit, or exit, of the audience; the portion behind the curtain has been equally lavishly attended to. Saloons covered with glass, and furnished with ottomans, invite the

abandoned of both sexes to public profligacy, and, in fact, they may be said to be magnificent temples devoted to luxury and show, and, under bad management, to vice and immorality.

They are exclusively the theatres of royalty, being invested, by patents from the crown, with the sole performance of the regular drama. Here alone, according to law, can the immortal works of Shakspeare, Jonson, Massinger, Fletcher, Beaumont, Ford, and the long line of illustrious poets and wits who have shed a continuous lustre on English literature from Elizabeth's to Anne's reign, find a living voice and being. Splendid privilege!—which must confer upon its performers and managers the highest intellectual dignity, and place them almost on the pinnacle of the fine and intellectual arts. How imposing must they seem to an educated foreigner! With what a thrilling and reverential deference must he enter their classic walls, and fancy that he is breathing a more empyreal atmosphere, redolent with the brightest flashes of the poet, joyous with the brilliant wit of accumulated ages. England has erected two temples to conserve the genius of her unrivalled dramatists; her kings have heaped privileges on them, senates have confirmed and enlarged these prerogatives, capitalists have expended their thousands of thousands in adorning and embellishing them. Fatal delusion!—he enters them, and finds his eyes dazzled by the gorgeousness of the audience part; he cannot see the countenances of

the performers without the aid of a pocket telescope, he cannot hear any thing except the ranted speeches; he hopes to enjoy a comedy of character and wit, or a tragedy of pathos and passion; but the performances are 'Cymon,' the 'Somnambulist,' and the 'Invincibles;' or, 'The Red Mask, or the Council of Three,' and 'St. George and the Dragon.' He asks where he can see the drama he has studied, and on which he heard Schlegel lecture so popularly at Vienna? he is told that it does not pay "to *do them*" at these theatres, and that the others dare not perform them. He shrugs his shoulders, says, "He thought *dis vas de land of liberty*, but it seems they are worse off than the oppressed Austrians, who permit their great dramatists to be performed, and only prevent the low performances that debase the public mind." Some adherent of the legitimates immediately explains to his highness, that it is to preserve the regular drama that the exclusive privileges are granted, and running thro' the gamut of the argument, repeats the words "vested interest," "sacrilege to Shakspeare," "prescriptive right," "all nonsense;" and, having exhausted his lungs, pauses triumphantly for a reply; but the noble foreigner merely politely answers, "I cannot understand; it appear ver strange to me; you have the finest drama of the whole world in your old books, but the worst in the whole world on your modern stages; it is one great mystery." Leaving the foreigner to unravel the riddle as well as he is able,

we will endeavour to see, by an examination of the proceedings of the two royal establishments, how far he is right in his assertion.

Our business is with the present state of the drama; and, therefore, we need not go far back in our inquiry. The last great epoch at Drury-lane was Kean's appearance in 1814, at which time the theatre was in a most deplorable state, involved deeply in debt, and at a very low ebb as regards theatrical talent. Kean became the rage, and drew by his popularity immense houses. His genius was of the highest order—original, forcible, and abundant; but he had many faults, both as regard his art and himself. He was greedy of applause, envious of rival talent, arrogant and overbearing, if not as a man, as an actor; his might lay in the splendour of his imagination and the vigour of his portrayal; his weakness in the selfish engrossing of all attention to himself; and he, perhaps, more than any great actor, fomented the illiterate and narrow-minded taste of only regarding one character in a play, thus reducing it to a mere vehicle for the exhibition of the talents of an individual. He was the least of a stage reformer of any performer holding so distinguished a place in the public estimation. He preferred Cibber's theatrical 'Richard the Third' to Shakspeare's dramatic, and he would have been the last to have had one of his own "points" cut out to heighten the general effect of the play. In these respects, he was like the common run of actors,

seeking and caring only for the production of effects, and careless whether the applause was elicited by genius or trick. These remarks are made in no disparaging spirit, but with the most glowing admiration of his genius, which seemed truly the effect of inspiration, and which flashed with almost superhuman power amidst a mass of mannerisms, and occasional tricks, that only made it the more miraculous and irresistible. He was the support of Drury-lane Theatre, with some partial interruptions, until the decay and melancholy break-up of his faculties. And such was the poverty of talent and the state of the regular drama, that long after his physical powers had forsaken him he was dragged by the policy of trading managers before the public. His name, "a tower of strength," was used with every trick of theatrical management to prop the tottering theatre; and it was with the deepest regret his intellectual admirers, who still were resolved to see him to the very last, beheld him reel across that stage, where his glorious energy had once inspirited thousands. At length, utterly exhausted, he was compelled to retire, and he left the theatre in a worse state than he found it; every thing had been sacrificed to him, and he created a school of acting, which, if not elevated by genius like his own, is utterly unendurable.

Be it understood, that it is not intended by these remarks to offer a critical estimate of the genius of Kean, the memory of which is strong beyond words,

in the feelings of those who suffered themselves to be borne upward and along by his unrivalled energies. He is only alluded to here with relation to the present subject, and with a view to show the character and extent of his influence upon dramatic art, in principle as well as practice.

About the same time, Mr. Young took leave of the stage at this theatre, and with him departed the last of a school of high attainments and cultivated talent.

From this time the bills display a miserable struggle for popularity; show and scenery endeavouring to supply the place of intellectual ability; and the following announcement sufficiently proves the uses to which one of the national theatres was applied, and we shall presently see it was pretty much the same at the other privileged house:—"Theatre Royal, Drury-lane, Wednesday, Oct. 7, 1835. 'Hamlet' and the 'Maid of Cashmere.' The public is respectfully requested to take notice that the popular productions of the last two seasons, consisting of 'Gustavus the Third,' 'Lestocq,' 'The Challenge,' 'The Minister and Mercer,' 'The Red Mask,' 'Secret Service,' 'My Neighbour's Wife,' 'The Regent,' 'St. George and the Dragon,' 'King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table,' 'A Good Looking Fellow,' 'The Revolt of the Harem,' 'Cinderella,' 'The Ferry and the Mill,' 'Scan Mag:'—and all the other novelties produced during that period, being by purchase of copyright, and by

authorship, the property of the lessee of this theatre, and all the new scenery, machinery, dresses, and decorations used in their representation, having been transferred to this establishment, these pieces can only be acted at Drury-lane."

Such was the unblushing announcement of the lessee of the first theatre in England, which claimed and exercised a patent for the exclusive right (with one exception) of performing the genuine drama. But worse remains behind; all restraint was at last abandoned. Mr. Van Amburgh's "tame wild beasts" succeeded Mr. Ducrow's horses and the chief metropolitan theatre became a wild beast show, and ultimately a shilling concert-room, where the refuse of society assembled.

Commencing with Covent-garden Theatre at the same time as we did with Drury-lane, we find Miss O'Neil for a few seasons supporting the intellectual drama, but her secession was much earlier than that of her great contemporary, Kean, and consequently that kind of drama the sooner sank to its secondary station. Examining the play-bills, we trace a succession of the most extravagant spectacles, which, with false glare, misled and debauched the public taste. 'Cherry and Fair Star,' 'The Vision of the Sun,' 'The Cataracts of the Ganges,' 'The Spirits of the Moon,' 'Peter Wilkins,' 'Cymon,' 'The Somnambulist,' 'Raymond and Agnes,' 'The Bottle Imp,' 'Past and Present, or, The Hidden Treasure,' 'Cinderella,' Laporte, Taglioni, Paganini, 'Timour

the Tartar,' 'Manfred,' 'Robert Macaire,' 'Paul Clifford,' &c. Some attempts were made to give the genuine drama, and in 1829, Miss F. Kemble was put through the chief female characters, but with a partial popularity. Mr. Osbaldiston's management has been somewhat too violently abused. His chief fault was his vile arrangements in the audience part of the theatre, which, from his lowering the prices, and neglecting appearances, and not exercising a proper control, became vulgar and disgusting in the extreme. In the last part of his lesseeship, however, more was done towards the performance of the regular drama, than there ever has been since. Several of Shakspeare's finest plays were very strongly cast. Charles Kemble, Vandenhoff, Macready, with Farren, G. Bennett, H. Wallack, &c., to second, with dingy scenery, and incorrect costume, drew as good, if not better houses than Mr. Macready, *solus cum solo*, with fine scenery and show.

The seasons of 1838 and 1839, have acquired from a few followers of the theatre, a far too exaggerated admiration. Mr. Macready found the theatre in a state of filth, and he cleaned it. Stimulated by the pique which induced him to take the theatre, he exerted himself by every means in his power to create a sensation. In the first of his two seasons he failed, and could only proceed with the assistance of those he employed. It was now found necessary to have recourse to a system

of indirect puffing. Theatrical humbug (the latter word has been rendered classical by a former president of the Royal Society) was carried to its greatest height; and some adept in the art thought of "reviving" the popular plays of Shakspeare. "Correctness of costume" was a phrase invented to excuse pageantry, as was "accuracy of locality" for spectacle. 'Hamlet,' 'Lear,' 'Macbeth,' 'Coriolanus,' 'The Tempest,' 'Othello,' 'Henry the Fifth,' were now "revived." 'Romeo and Juliet,' and 'The Taming of the Shrew,' and 'As You Like It,' were only played, not revived. The revivals consisted in new dressing and new scening these little-known productions. An attempt was made to claim merit for the restoration of the pure text, but in no instance was this done. The same system of interpolation—the same dislocation of the scenes—the same mutilation of the dialogue—the same destruction of the general for a particular effect—the same spurious taste was pursued. It was said by the zealots of the theatre, that Shakspeare would have delighted in seeing his plays thus performed; but as he would have perceived how they were misinterpreted he would have smiled at the conceit. Had his illustrious commentators, Schlegel or Goethe, witnessed such mangled restorations, they would have pronounced the nation unworthy of the greatest genius that ever existed. Had these plays been put forward without puffery and pretence, they would have passed as very excellent stage re-

presentations, remarkable for show and decoration, but certainly not as intellectual comments on the immortal works. "Save me from my friends," is the finest of all proverbs, and Mr. Macready must have frequently uttered it. By injudicious and excessive praise for acting with common honesty, they raised (most unjustly) a doubt of his character; by their claims for an unusual appreciation of Shakspeare, they have incited the contumelious remarks of those most profoundly acquainted with the great plays; by a claim to extraordinary archaological accuracy they have excited a searching criticism that has proved his knowledge to be superficial; by exaggerated adulation, they have called attention to his deficiencies as an actor; and by their perfidious flattery, they seem to have confirmed him in a declamatory style of acting, into which he appears to have settled, after alternating between the passionate transitions and colloquialisms of Kean, the polished declamation of Young, and the studied graces of the Kembles. This foolish conduct is to be regretted, as it has called forth a spirit of indignation against what appeared to be a usurpation of the rights and claims of other portions of the theatrical world, and the more so, as it must be allowed that Mr. Macready's management was of great service to the art by raising it in the estimation of the influential classes of society, and by leading the way to a higher and better mode of representation.

The present management at Covent-garden is proceeding with the taste that characterised it in its former theatre. In the way of embellishment it is surpassing the previous attempts, without making any extraordinary claim for so doing. The course it has already been compelled to take, proves, however, that the larger theatres have incapacitated themselves for the fulfilment of their own patent privileges—and that unable, with any chance of success, to make the regular drama the staple commodity or “leading article,” they must forsake it, or be ruined. Thus situated, that kind of entertainment will perish, without an alteration of the law ; to consider the state of which shall be our next point.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE HISTORY OF THE PATENTS.

The Theatres at the Restoration—The Two Companies—Dorset Gardens Theatre—Junction of the Patents—Betterton's Patent—Lincoln's Inn Fields Theatre—Origin of the Opera House—The Lord Chamberlain's Power—Both the Patents suspended—Collier's License—Sir Richard Steele's License—Successors to Steele's License—Drury Lane Patent—Evil of Patent Grants.

THE rise and progress of the English drama, its connection with classical literature, the circumstances that have affected, and the taste that has controlled it, have now been discussed. Its existing state both at the minor and larger houses has also been delineated, and it can scarcely be denied that the present drama of England is disgraceful to its literature and intellect, and in comparison with other branches of art and science, contemptibly beneath mediocrity. To endeavour to trace the causes of this gradual "atrophy" of the art, is one of the chief objects of the present volume; and as one, if not the sole cause, appears to be the legislation that has been en-

acted towards it, we shall proceed to trace this branch of its history.

From the year 1649 to the year 1660 theatrical performances were forbidden by law, and the Puritans hoped they had completely abolished an entertainment which their fanaticism led them to consider as incompatible with Christian purity. The Cavaliers, however, on the contrary, were only furnished by these proceedings with an additional stimulus to promote this form of recreation, and on the restoration of Charles II., the merry monarch and his court seem to have patronised the theatre as much from contempt towards the Roundheads, as from natural inclination. To secure a control over what in that age was no mean organ of publicity, and which then, in some degree, effected results now gained by means of the newspaper press, and also as a cheap means of rewarding the staunch adherence of two zealous Cavaliers, exclusive patents were granted to Sir William Davenant and Mr. Thomas Killigrew. By these instruments it was designed to confine the performance of all theatrical representations of whatever kind to the two patentees and their assigns, and for a time this was effected; and an agreement was entered into as to the appropriation of the old standard plays and of the existing actors. In the spring of 1662 Davenant opened at the theatre in Portugal-row, Lincoln's Inn-fields, the performers having been sworn as "the Duke of York's Company of Comedians." Killigrew's actors,



who had also been sworn in by the Lord Chamberlain, and were entitled, "The Company of the King," performed at the Red Bull Theatre in Clerkenwell, and at the Tennis Court, near Clare-market, until the 8th of April, 1663, when a new theatre, erected on a spot called the Riding-yard, in Drury-lane, the site of the present theatre, was opened by them. This new theatre had no connection with, and was not erected on the site of, the Cockpit or Phoenix (the Drury-lane theatre of the elder time), that being situated on the opposite side of the way, higher up towards Great Queen-street.

These two companies, created as they were by the court, shaped their course under its immediate patronage and almost management, and from the smallness of their size, in proportion to the population, we feel assured that the court and its followers must have been their principal audience and support. At first some few of the plays of the elder dramatists, and more particularly Beaumont and Fletcher's, were performed. These, however, were gradually superseded by the productions of Dryden and the other wits of the day, who adapted themselves to the taste of their audience, and entirely forsaking the old path of nature and poetical imagination, enlisted conventional sentiment, party spirit, court flattery, and the corrupt taste of the time for fustian rhyme, as the means of success. Even the comedy, though very brilliant, was more that of manners and diction than of character.

Sir W. Davenant died in 1668, and his widow, Lady Davenant, was associated with Betterton and Harris (the chief actors), and her eldest son, Dr. Davenant, in the management of the theatre. The performances under this proprietage were conducted at the then newly-erected theatre in Dorset Gardens, at the bottom of Dorset-street, on the banks of the Thames. They consisted principally of operas and spectacles, so soon was the taste of the town debauched under the influence of monopoly. In 1681 (less than eighteen years after the granting of the patents), the holders of Davenant's patent, in a very base way, entered into a compact (against the very letter and spirit of both patents) with the two principal performers under Killigrew's patent (Hart and Kynaston), to withdraw from that company—a preliminary step to the junction of the two companies, which ultimately took place in 1682, according to Gildon, in 1684 according to Cibber, and in 1686 according to the *Biographia Britannica* (article "Betterton.") In 1687 Dr. Davenant, having inherited his father's patent on his mother's death, assigned it to his brother Alexander. Thomas Killigrew died in 1682, and it would seem that the necessary transfer of his property had some connection with the junction of the companies and patents; but these transactions are very indistinctly narrated, most of the histories being partial statements drawn up to answer some particular purpose. In 1690, the proprietage of the two patents and

of the united company was vested in Christopher Rich, an attorney, and certain other shareholders, entitled "Adventurers." It is nowhere distinctly stated how this transfer of property took place, but it is said that Rich paid only sixty pounds to Alexander Davenant for his father's patent, so little value was at that time attached to these documents. The united company continued to perform with very indifferent success until 1694, when the discontent at Rich's arbitrary and disreputable conduct became so violent, that King William granted Betterton and the chief actors a license or patent to perform on their own account. On the granting of this new license, the highest legal authorities were applied to as to the exclusiveness of the original patents, and it was the universal opinion that they could not be binding on the successors of Charles, and that the crown had a right to grant any license it pleased.

By this new license Betterton's company was styled "The King's Company," notwithstanding Killigrew's patent which Rich still held, and in virtue of which, in conjunction with Davenant's, he still acted. A new theatre was opened by Betterton on the 30th April, 1695, on the site of the old one in Portugal Row, Lincoln's Inn Fields, and of this Congreve and Vanburgh became ultimately proprietors. Rich's company, consisting of Cibber, Mrs. Oldfield, &c., continued performing at Drury-lane, and occasionally at Dorset Gardens, under both the patents, and though at first they were con-

siderably injured by the popularity of the new company, they ultimately regained their station ; and the proprietors of the Lincoln's Inn Fields theatre, which was now under the direction of Sir John Vanburgh and Congreve, to whom Betterton's license had been assigned, resolved on erecting a theatre that by its magnificence should force the town, as they vainly expected, into support. This was the origin of what is now called the Opera House, which was erected by subscription, and opened on the 9th April, 1705, for Italian operas and the regular drama. The appearance of this theatre was very magnificent, but it was so badly constructed that it did not become popular until it had undergone great alteration ; and Congreve (a cautious man) early resigned his share, and Sir John Vanburgh was compelled by the state of his circumstances to assign his license and property in it to a Mr. Owen Swiney (apparently an adventurer and a creature of Rich's), who accordingly became the manager in 1706 or 1707.

The changes of the theatres at this time are very intricate, and a system of conduct seems to have been pursued by the government towards them, which with our imperfect knowledge appears to be arbitrary and venal in the extreme. Cibber gives us several instances of the despotism of the Lord Chamberlain, who felt himself authorised to commit the actors to prison, suspend the performances, and

even transfer the licenses and patents as he deemed fit.

It appears that Rich, by involving the affairs of his theatre in a continual mystery, and pleading poverty and want of success, contrived to prevent his fellow sharers or "adventurers" from participating in the profits; and that Sir Thomas Skipwith, who was a large sharer with Rich, was so disgusted with his proceedings, that he made over his share to a Colonel Brett, a gentleman of fortune, in the idea that "being a great favourite with the people in power," he might get something like justice. Under this authority Colonel Brett acted, and by his interest with the vice chamberlain he contrived to have it ordered that Owen Swiney should be compelled to give up the comedians (with whom he was succeeding very well), and that it should be arranged that the Haymarket theatre should have the sole power of performing Italian Opera, and Drury Lane the English drama, there to act as "Her Majesty's *only* company of comedians."

This arrangement, however, was as brittle as any of the previous arbitrary regulations, and in 1709, the chief actors revolted from the control of Rich and the patentees, who had, immediately they possessed the power, began again to oppress and cheat them. By influence with the Lord Chamberlain, this revolt was sanctioned, and Cibber and all the good actors, with the exception of Booth, then a

young man, and a few of no note, "all walked out of the house, to which they never returned till they became themselves the tenants and masters of it."

Rich, with his two patents, was now completely silenced by the Lord Chamberlain, and forbid in any way to exercise them—an extraordinary proof that these documents, now held so sacred, were and had been long considered as valid only during the life of the grantor and the pleasure of the Chamberlain. This proprietor indeed was never allowed again to exercise them, and they remained in abeyance for more than five years, the two theatres, Drury Lane and the Haymarket, playing without any regard to them the whole time.

On the suspension of the patents Rich still retained Drury-lane, refusing to give up possession; a Mr. Collier, however, described as an "adventurous barrister," and who was a member of parliament for Truro, conceiving some advantage might be gained by it, exercised his "court influence, which, wherever the stage was concerned, was not inconsiderable," and obtained a license to form a company, and take possession of Drury-lane Theatre, which he did by forcible means, at the head of a rabble, in November, 1709, having previously obtained a lease of the other shareholders. His only object was to make money out of the actors, and his license was granted to him by government with this view, the whole transaction being, in fact, a most barefaced and disgraceful job.

At the end of his first season (1710) Collier found himself a loser, and depending on his court influence applied a second time to the Lord Chamberlain that he might compel Owen Swiney and the actors to exchange the Haymarket and operas for Drury-lane and the English drama; and this, with an allowance of two hundred a-year, and other advantageous stipulations in addition, was ratified.

This proceeding would seem sufficiently arbitrary, but there appears no limit to the absolutism and venality of the court. Evidently incompetent to what he aimed at, he in the next year (1711) actually compelled Swiney, "by his court influence," to go back to the Haymarket, which his bad management had greatly depreciated, while he took again to Drury-lane, which Swiney and the actors had worked into a profitable speculation. This was Swiney's ruin, and Cibber tells us that "he was driven to attend his fortune in some more favoured climate, where he remained twenty years an exile." Collier completed his honourable conduct by screwing a sinecure out of the Drury-lane company of seven hundred a year, leaving them to manage the theatre. It is well worthy of observation that by the last license, granted by Anne, all others were specially revoked.

As the fluctuations of the proprietage of the theatre henceforward were not so complex as heretofore, it may be as well to see how the exclusive grants had now been disposed of. The patents of Da-

venant and of Killegrew were lying dormant in Rich's strong box; the Haymarket theatre was enacting Italian operas and the English drama, under the license originally granted to Betterton by King William, and Drury-lane was opened under a license granted (as a parliamentary job) to Collier and his assigns.

Upon the death of Queen Anne (1st of August, 1714), Cibber says, "Their license, however, being to be renewed, the vacation gave the managers time to cast about for the better alteration of it; and since they knew the pension of seven hundred a year, which had been levied upon them for Collier, *must still be paid to somebody*, they imagined the merit of a Whig might now have as good a chance for getting into it, as that of a Tory had for being continued in it. Having no obligations, therefore, to Collier, who had made the last penny of them, they applied themselves to Sir Richard Steele, who had distinguished himself by his zeal for the house of Hanover." It appears also that they felt a regard towards Sir Richard for his long-continued support of them in his periodical publications. This appeal was successful, and the license or patent, through the influence of Steele's great patron, the Duke of Marlborough, was granted to the worthy knight, and to "the former actors, who were managers," (Cibber, Wilks, Dogget, and Booth). This license or patent had also the advantage of being for a specified period, namely—Sir Richard's life, and three years after his death.

On the death of Steele, in 1729, the license was renewed for twenty-one years from the 1st of September, 1730. This license passed from the assigns of the four managers into the hands of Fleetwood, and on its renewal to Lacy and Garrick, and subsequently to Sheridan, Linley, and Ford; and on the rebuilding of the theatre in 1792, in the costly manner in which it was erected by the aid of subscriptions, it became vested in the subscribers partially, if not wholly. The cost of the erection and decoration of this new theatre was about two hundred thousand pounds. It was now determined to purchase the dormant patent, as Killigrew's was termed, and that document, after having been in abeyance a hundred years, was sold by the proprietors of Covent-garden Theatre to the Drury-lane proprietage for twenty thousand pounds. As only a portion of the money could be paid, the remainder was left on mortgage, bearing interest, in the hands of the Covent-garden proprietage.

In 1809 this new theatre was entirely destroyed by fire, and the present one erected by a joint-stock subscription company of sharers of five hundred and one hundred pounds each. In 1816 the twenty-one years' license was renewed, because, as it may be supposed, the dormant patent had not been able to be redeemed. It is said, however, that the license was not renewed in 1837, but that the patent was actually transferred to the proprietors of Drury-lane, and that this theatre now performs by that docu-

ment, which after slumbering, and indeed after being annulled by the deed of 1682, which united the two companies, and revoked by the last license, granted by Anne, was resuscitated at an interval of a hundred and fifty-five years. Lawyers can alone settle the question of there being any such legal inherent vitality in a patent grant; but, at all events, morally we are certain it is to be regretted that the will of an individual can thus hamper the movements of a century and a half, and extend the narrow views of one period in so indefinite a manner, into succeeding ages.

It has been asserted, upon no less authority than a former lessee of the theatre, that Killigrew's patent is not in existence, it having perished with other documents in the fire of 1809. By other authority, perhaps equally worthy of credit, it is said now to be in the possession of Coutts's banking-house. The actual existence of the parchment has, however, little to do with the legal, and certainly nothing with the moral, question of the good or evil of the monopoly.

The confusion and evil arising from endeavouring to control by rigid provisions those things that will, if left free, accommodate themselves to the wants and wishes of the period, have been amply proved in the brief history of the patents. Before entering upon the laws and other circumstances coercing the drama, we will conclude the present chapter with a recapitulation of the state of the drama from the granting of the patents.

For the first twenty years the town had two theatres; for the succeeding twelve one theatre; for the next forty-three years two theatres; for the next twenty-one years six theatres, which lasted until the commencement of the present century, when the various minor theatres began to advance from "dumb show" to burletta and melodrame, some with the license of the Chamberlain, and others with that of the magistrates. The intellectual drama was all this time confined to a most narrow field. When there were only two theatres, one was almost exclusively devoted to show and spectacle; and when there was only one, the regular drama was less frequently played than operas and pageants. After 1737, when these gradually increased to five, the Haymarket was devoted to Italian opera; the little theatre there, which then was emerging from being an exhibition-room, was principally devoted to farces and light pieces; Astley's to horsemanship and feats of agility; Covent-garden to pantomime and spectacle; and Drury-lane more exclusively to the regular drama. We have seen with what struggles the players maintained themselves at all, and we also see that all this fostering and licensing, and unlicensing, and all the fierce endeavour to maintain the exclusive privileges, only engendered an evasion of the law and deterioration of the art which is almost beyond cure. At present three theatres can alone perform any one of the productions of our fine regular drama, while the whole sixteen may perform 'Jack Sheppard.'

CHAPTER IX.

THE LEGAL ENACTMENTS AFFECTING THE
DRAMA.

The Licenser's Act—The Licensing Act—The State of Dramatic Literature—Effect of the Monopoly—Effect of the 25th Geo. II. The Law encourages the worst kind of Drama—The Reform of the Theatre—Mr. Horne's Dramas.

IN addition to the licensing system and the patents, the drama has been oppressed by very severe statutory enactments. By an act passed in the 10th of George the Second, confirmatory of one enacted in the last year of Anne's reign, any actor who performed in any kind of theatrical entertainment without special license from the crown, or without having a settlement in the place where he performed, was to be deemed a rogue and vagabond. As it was scarcely possible for an actor to have a settlement in more than one place, this put an end to actors visiting the provincial theatres, and threw an odium as well as imposed a most galling restriction on the pursuit of the art. This act is generally known as the Licenser's Act, it having been passed at the instigation of Sir Robert Walpole, who smarted under the ill-judged satire of Fielding. The latter certainly

deserves no thanks from the lovers of the drama for provoking the wrath of a minister so powerful and so unscrupulous as Sir Robert, by making the stage the medium of political aggression. By this law, the preamble of which confesses the intention of crushing the drama, or at least of placing it completely within the power of the crown, the Lord Chamberlain's and even the King's power is limited to the granting licenses or patents in the City of Westminster, or such place as the King shall personally reside in. Very stringent regulations are made to enforce this act, and by it at the present day, according to the most eminent legal authorities, "the representation of *any kind of dramatic entertainments*, even of such pieces as may have been denied exhibition at the patent theatres, and actually purchased by the others, is an infringement of these statutes, and subjects *all parties* proved to be concerned in such representations to a penalty of fifty pounds for each performance." By the 25th of George II., chap. 36, (the Licensing Act), which act was confirmed and enlarged by 28 Geo. III., chap. 30, power is given to magistrates in London and Westminster, and within twenty miles, in sessions, to grant licenses for music and dancing and other entertainments of the like kind ; and power is given to magistrates in sessions to grant a license to perform such plays as are represented at the patent theatres, so as such place be not within twenty miles of London. By the last provision the

provincial theatres are legalised, but it is only by an infringement of the former act that the London minor theatres perform any dramatic entertainment at all (except those licensed by the Lord Chamberlain situate in Westminster), and every night such theatres enact any thing beyond singing and dancing—which they always do—they are infringing the law, and every one of the audience participates in and countenances a breach of the laws, and consequently performs an immoral act. This crime (for such it is) is participated in by the magistrates who leniently, but falsely, construe the words “singing” and “dancing” to mean any kind of drama, even the regular, for they never hint at refusing the license, though the regular drama be the customary performance of the theatre. Such a state of the law is anomalous in the extreme; and, but that we are too ready to use fictions, instead of adapting the law to the *morale* of the circumstances, the common sense of the nation would revolt at the fact of a large body of men, some of the highest respectability, including the magistrates, the managers, the actors, and the audience, all committing or aiding in a breach of the law, for which they are in no danger of rebuke or punishment, and for which it would be next to impossible to get a jury to condemn them. As it would be as vain as impolitic in the present day to endeavour to restrain the rational amusements of the multitude, it surely will not admit of a doubt that it is quite time that the law should be altered:

and that, having become a scarecrow without power, for the sake of the general state and force of good government it should be removed from the statute-book. Any proceedings so sanctioned by authority, so supported by sound reasoning and popular feeling, should not be allowed to be put in opposition to the law, as a constant proof of its injustice and its weakness. The habitual successful violation of legal enactments ever destroys their moral power, and encourages the popular mind in a contemptuous and rebellious feeling, very opposed to just and prudent legislation.

The evil effects of the narrow and venal policy exercised towards the stage manifest themselves in every direction of the subject. It has, as we have seen, produced an absurd and derogatory position as regards the law, and we shall find that, as regards its literature and its acting, it has been equally injurious.

A pamphlet (by the author of this volume) on "The Past and Present State of Dramatic Literature" (and which at least has been useful in proving that the press of the country is on the side of a free trade in the drama, that principle having been supported by upwards of a hundred newspapers, with the exception of four), has entered more particularly on this branch of the subject, and by a variety of facts shows that while the drama was unshackled, plays were far higher literary productions, and far more numerous than since. It will be sufficient,

therefore, here to trace the progress of that new kind of drama engendered by the peculiar position of the theatres with regard to the law.

On the granting the exclusive patents, but two theatres (frequently only one at a time) were permitted to perform what is considered the best kind of drama; but, although the quality could be dictated, it was found impossible to restrain the quantity; and in consequence of the increasing demands of the people, additional theatres were allowed to perform an inferior kind of entertainment. Oppressed and fettered by the patronage, and almost surveillance, of the court, after the Restoration, the drama became a mere echo of its sentiments and tastes. Its guides and rulers being sensualists, it became sensual in the extreme, and unable to maintain the false energy and wit that for awhile made a show of intellect, it in less than twenty years had recourse to spectacle and music for its almost entire support. It is the property of all monopolies to be the creature of a few and not of the many; and the monopoly of the theatre has proved no exception to this principle. As it passed from manager to manager it received the impress of its governors, who were swayed but by one motive, the making it a medium of profit. It is seldom that the proprietor of an exclusive privilege is of so elevated an understanding as to be able to gauge the real taste or capacity of the public mind; but, at the best, he is usually guided by a clique of those whom he deems to be

the leading intellects of the day, and, indeed, who may be so, and yet totally unequal in genius to appeal to, or to excite, the loftier qualities and capacities of the public. Such was the case with the theatre. The wits presided over it in Charles II.'s time, to the exclusion of genuine poetry and passion. The sentimentalists, Otway, Lee, Rowe, &c. next succeeded ; and in after times came the light satirists of fashionable life, Congreve, Steele, &c. During each of these theatrical dynasties, there was, undoubtedly, ample space for a more universal drama, such as had existed in the olden time—the drama of nature, character, and observation ; but the law, by narrowing the theatrical area, precluded the possibility of its manifesting itself, and the favourers of the monopoly then, with the ignorant injustice that usually adheres to the unjustly exalted, proclaimed that the taste for it was extinct, and that it had run its natural course. To such it was vain to say that the skilful delineation of human nature would always interest, and that there was the same material to work upon as ever, and, probably, the same genius to excite it, provided the way was cleared, and perfect freedom afforded for its manifestation. That this was the fact is proved by the various attempts that were made to throw off the incubus of the monopoly. Two of the greatest geniuses in their kind that England ever produced first manifested their talents in opposition to the law. Fielding and Garrick both appeared at illegal theatres, and the

latter, who may be said to have restored nature to the drama, only overpowered the legal impediments to his career, by the possession of abilities so much beyond the usual average of talent, that it is fair to conclude that many actors and dramatists of great ability were unable to pass the barriers thrown around the drama by partial legislation.

That the public taste for theatrical entertainments was and is indestructible, is proved by the increase of the theatres, the demand for which was so strong that, in opposition to the real wishes of the court and the ministers, it was found to be judicious to relax some of the rigidity of the law; and fifteen years after the passing of the licenser's act, the magistrates were empowered (25th Geo. II., c. 36) "to grant licenses for music and dancing and other entertainments of the like kind." Could the framers of this act have known that they were laying the foundation for an extension of the drama of the lowest kind, and multiplying playhouses of the worst sort, they would have withdrawn in horror from the proposition. Such, however, was the case. From this time we find the smaller theatres advanced from singing and dancing and feats of agility to recitative, and so on to burletta, vaudeville, farce, melodrame. At this point the law stopped them; they were advancing towards an intellectual amusement, and they must be stayed, as that had already been sold to patent retailers. That the taste of the multitude would have been elevated to the enjoyment of the

higher and better drama, can no more be disputed than that it has risen by the free dissemination of the noblest works of literature to a due appreciation of them. Had Shakspeare been as freely acted as printed, audiences would have fully appreciated him and his class on the stage as on the table. Such was, however, not the case; and we have now accumulated a mass of theatrical literature almost frightful to contemplate for its meanness and its absurdity, its debasing influence and revolting vulgarity. There are some extraordinary exceptions to this sweeping denunciation; but could any one undergo the punishment of perusing the whole of the minor drama from the time of passing this act to the present time, he would confess it to be just in the main.

This strange position of the law which encourages the production of the worst kind of writing and acting, is a contradiction so outrageous, that if it referred to any commercial matter, it would be swept away at a vote. But the state of the public amusements, though affecting the whole of society *generally*, does not affect a large class so *particularly* as to induce a vehement call for the redress of the wrong. The audiences, who are the parties really most concerned, are in the state of children, who are not likely to call out for a better system of education; but, on the contrary, only clamour for an increase of stimulants—for more show and noise, to satisfy their misdirected tastes.

The actors are, in general, occupied with immediate results, and though bitterly suffering from the unjust system, have not foresight and unanimity sufficient to make themselves regarded. The stage dramatists are nearly in the same position, and are content to remain in their humiliating station as intellectual tailors to the theatres, providing shows and adapting parts to the commands of their employers.

If reform come to the theatres, it must emanate from a higher and more intellectual class, who, knowing the capacity of the drama, regret its degraded situation. There are yet in the higher walks of literature and the state men who have agreeable associations with the theatre, and a genuine relish for our splendid dramatic literature. The House of Lords and the government itself, possess many members who have done honour to the dramatic muses. The premier himself has laid offerings on the shrine of Thalia. Lord Holland has revealed the Spanish drama to us; and no doubt Lord Brougham, in his Briareus-like pursuits, has commented on the subject, if he has not himself added to its stores. Would that they would consider the subject worthy, as it is, of legislation, and remove from it those shackles that have degraded it into a low and disreputable trade. The talents of the other house would cordially support them. Many of these have distinguished themselves as dramatists, and a very strong phalanx of names presents itself. Sheil, Talfourd, Bulwer, Lord Morpeth, Lord Mahon,

Lord J. Russell, Emmerson Tennent, Monckton Milnes, D'Israeli, Gally Knight, Lord Francis Egerton, and numerous others of all parties and political creeds, have manifested a genius for literature, and many have made worthy offerings to the dramatic muses, and should endeavour to award the rights due to them.

The educated part of the public would echo their appeal, and the literature of the nation would support it. Journals and works on all sides, from the 'Quarterly' and 'Edinburgh Reviews,' to the smallest weekly paper, have declared the necessity of legislation, and have tacitly agreed to consider it, as it is, a perfectly open question, unconnected with politics, and belonging solely to literature and the fine arts.

That there is something "rotten in the state" would be alone sufficiently proved by the fact that the author of 'Cosmo de Medici,' the 'Death of Marlowe,' and the 'Essays on the Undeveloped Characters of Shakspeare,' is not one of the foremost writers for the stage as he is for the study. This author is cited, because he is gifted with the highest dramatic faculty, and he, of all the moderns who have yet tried "the bow of Ulysses," has best succeeded in speeding an arrow into the bull's eye. His two noble dramas are not mere wordy imitations of the elder dramatists, catching only their quaintness and ferocity, but kindred productions, inspired by a like vigorous and splendid imagination, alike guided by the instinct of a lofty genius, at once penetrating

and universal. The tragedy of 'Cosmo de Medici' has the might of Marlowe in it, and "In sceptred pall comes sweeping by," a deep and rushing stream of human woe, resistless in its course. 'The Death of Marlowe' is a superb piece of animation and diction, worthy of the noblest period of our high impassioned drama. These are no frigid imitations of a worn-out form, no forced emanations of an over-cultivated talent, but the outpourings of a rich and abundant genius. They are here alluded to as the strongest amongst many of the proofs of the vile state of the theatre, which, so far from coveting, shuns such productions, avoiding them as things it cannot comprehend, and therefore dreads. To such works, as to Shelley's 'Cenci,' performance can add no honours, and the neglect of them can only be a reproach to the managers and their patrons. Were the restrictions removed, there can be no doubt, however, that such works, and others of the same class, if not quality, would quickly find a theatre for themselves; and though at first they might have "a fit audience and few," they would ultimately engender a better taste, and leaven the whole theatric circle.

It does not come within the scope of this outline to estimate the various abilities of living dramatists; and the one now referred to is selected as a proof of the neglect by the theatres of true dramatic genius. At present there are two classes of dramatic writers: the one for the stage, the other for the closet. The former has doubtless amongst it many

writers of high ability, who have stooped themselves to the conventional demands of a corrupted stage ; and who, if placed in their right position, above instead of below the actors, would produce dramas of the highest and best class. Mr. Knowles has done wonders, shackled as he has been by the state of the theatres, and, the magnanimity with which he has dared to pourtray the finest and loftiest part of our natures, has secured him a lasting position amongst our great dramatists. Mr. Jerrold's various powers, embracing pathos and satire, have manifested themselves not only to the delight, but to the improvement of the age ; and, in a better state of theatrical affairs, there can be no doubt, directed to the highest form and aim of the drama, they would rank him with those elder poets he was amongst the first to emulate on the modern stage. Other names are not mentioned, from the want of space to characterise their excellencies ; and of the writers for the closet more will be said hereafter.

It remains but to prove to the actors, dramatists, and all connected with the theatres, the absolute necessity of seeking a reform in the law, in order to revive their pursuit and profession, and put it on a level with the other branches of the fine arts. At the same time, let it be always borne in mind, no privileges are sought for, it being only required that the law shall remove obsolete and partial barriers, and give to the cultivators of dramatic art, as to all other pursuits, freedom to work their own way.

CHAPTER X.

THE EFFECT OF THE MONOPOLY ON ACTORS.

Supineness of the Actors—Exclusiveness of the Patent Theatres—The Monopoly destructive to Actors—The Despotism of popular Actors—The Monologue System—The means of elevating the condition of Actors—The Wrongs of Intellectual Actors—Modern Theatrical Management—Deterioration of the Art—Advantages of the Free System to Actors.

THERE appear to be many actors who have not yet decided as to the good or evil of the monopoly in the drama. Some very intelligent men are to be met with who, though suffering all the evils engendered by the partial state of the law, yet cling to the national theatres with the same kind of devotion that the wooden-shoed serfs of the *ancien regime* of France formerly did to the “Grande Nation.” It has been said that as the individual pride lessens, the national increases—on the principle that when the more immediate causes of gratulation decrease, we seek the remoter to sustain the vanity inherent in our nature. And this seems to be the case with regard to the theatre ; its professors apparently cling to

the splendour of Drury-lane and Covent-garden Theatres as emblems of their professional grandeur, and as the links which connect them with the world of wealth and power. These are their Versailles and Tuileries; and no matter how depressed their own condition may be, they still derive some gratification from being an integral portion of a pursuit having such ostentatious marks of its existence.

Exclusiveness has always its charms, and often its power. The unthinking always consider it as indicative of merit, and therefore capable of conferring honour. The patent theatres could always confer distinction; and when in their flourishing state they possessed many performers of high attainments and ability, it certainly was creditable and serviceable to belong to them. Even then, however, the system of exclusiveness had the same cruel operation, and many men of genius, if not of the very highest class, yet of a rate very much beyond that of the average, withered under their ban; and, driven to rant and melodrame, or sawdust and buffoonery, with crushed hopes and desperate wills have passed their lives in the cheerless misery of an imaginative profession unimaginatively pursued.

It has been the aim of the writer to test his assertions and positions by the history of the theatres; and it will be found that this method will substantiate the statement that the monopoly of the patent theatres is the great cause of the sufferings of actors and the degradation of dramatic art, and that,

if not checked, it must prove its entire ruin. We see that the actors, as well as the stage writers, have deteriorated, and are sinking to a state of dissoluteness and contempt, from which, if allowed to reach the utmost point of degradation, it will be next to impossible to retrieve them.

The difficulties that beset the highest rank of acting, the hazards of its position, the uncertainty of its rewards, and the dubiousness of its station as regards polished society, are such as to deter men possessing the requisite attainments and abilities from attempting the pursuit. The ultimate object of candidates for the highest theatrical honours is to be permanently fixed at one of the national theatres. But to get there requires qualities rarely united in one being, and to maintain themselves when there, a combination of circumstances beyond their control. Owing to the vast size of the theatres, and the enormous rent and expenses, the managers play a desperate game, and make a stupendous outlay to command success. Variety and novelty are the chief objects they keep in view, in order to attract and secure the heterogeneous class that can alone fill their theatres. For this purpose they engage three, if not four, companies of actors : a set for tragedy and comedy—one for melodrama and pantomime—a large operatic company—and another for spectacle and ballets. To the regular actor and acting, this is fatal. If a *prima donna* become a favourite, there is a run on the piece, and the other three sets, or

two of them at least, are what is technically termed, "shelved;" that is, they are for forty, or fifty, or even a hundred nights, entirely withdrawn from the public notice, and from the practice of their art. In many instances they have been harassed by petty arts until they have thrown up their engagements in disgust, and if they do not suffer in this way, they rust in an idleness that is equally injurious to them. This would not be the case if there was not a monopoly, because then these four kind of companies would each find a theatre for itself, and the portion of the public who might still like to witness the species of drama it preferred, would have the advantage of doing so, and not be, as at present, debarred from it during the run of one particular piece.

When the law gave exclusive permission to the patentees to perform all kinds of stage representations, it did not contemplate the variety that has since arisen, nor foresee the evil it would produce. In addition to the other evils, is the overpowering authority it gives to one or two individuals. If a great tragedian becomes a favourite, he as certainly becomes a petty despot. By every art of the managers, his, perhaps just, celebrity is fostered into being "the rage." Puffs from every quarter of the newspaper compass create a tornado of talk; friendly *claqueurs* form bands (as in the case of Kean's "Wolves") to support him; all the other actors are sacrificed to him; dramatists bow down before him,

and the audience are bewildered into an undistinguishing admiration. His will has now become absolute, and even the managers tremble before "the brazen image" which they themselves have set up. Kemble's conduct to Colman, Kean's conduct to Bucke and to Grattan, are still fresh in the remembrance of the theatrical world. A more recent instance, however, is said to have occurred with the leading tragedian of the day, who, it is reported, issued his "ukase," whilst performing at the Haymarket, to the manager of the first national theatre, forbidding him to perform 'Hamlet,' and those plays in which he intended to appear four months after, until he came to perform them; thus—if he has done so—dictating to, and controlling the pleasures of the town, and depriving a very worthy brother actor (Mr. Elton) of the opportunity of displaying his abilities in those characters most suitable to him. If such be the case—and the assertion is very rife in theatrical circles—it bespeaks the drama to have sunk to a state beneath contempt; and renders the profession of acting one so exposed to insult and degradation as to be unworthy of an intellectual and cultivated person. We are ourselves witness to one piece of despotism on the part of "the tragedian" alluded to, in his performance of 'Shylock,' where he violated Shakspeare's text, and deprived a very pleasing actor (Hemming) of the little dialogue he had, in order to heighten, as he conceived, but in fact to throw a false glare on,

some of his own points. This piece of bad taste, as well as selfishness, occurred in the scene where Salanio and Salarino banter Shylock on the flight of his daughter. The dialogue was not "effective," as given by Shakspeare, and therefore the speeches of the inferior characters were jumbled together to suit the superior actor. Will these mighty actors never learn that a true play, such as one of Shakspeare's, is not a block of wood rudely carved, but a living tree, "with boughs, twigs, leaves, buds, blossoms, and fruit," and that these attempts to clip it, like the box-trees of the former cits' gardens, into grotesque shapes, is a barbarism and vulgarity that cannot any longer be tolerated.

These "fantastic tricks," and an infinite variety of others, tend to destroy the drama at its root. Not only are new plays written to display alone the peculiarities of one, or at the most, two favourites, but the ancient heir-looms of the theatre are mangled to suit the distortions of the reigning mime. The art of acting is withered and corrupted, and a play will soon be modelled on what some "great tragedian" is said to have desired, Cibber's 'Richard III.', with every part but Glo'ster's "cut to lines such as Catesby's." Had there not been a monopoly which enabled the few to take advantage of the many, by thus juggling them, the men of taste and power who were actors, would have revolted from the base system, and would have found a sufficiently enlightened audience to have supported them: but as

the law exists, the perverted system is upheld by every device that can allure the senses, and abase the judgment; and all better models being repressed, the playgoers themselves become corrupted, and acquiesce in the error. Give freedom to the theatre, and a healthier and sounder taste will revive. "The stars" will soon pale their ineffectual fires, or be contented to shine in their constellations.

The profession of an actor appears at present to be the very worst an intellectual man can select. Its requisites are more various, its difficulties greater, its remuneration (except to an exorbitantly paid few) worse, and more uncertain, and its duties more harassing, than those of any other. In addition to these impediments, it cannot be denied (although it is excessively unjust) that an odium still clings to it, arising from long existing prejudices, greatly fostered by the state of the art, and the conduct of many of its followers. The more ascetically religious portion of society have inherited a rooted aversion to it from the misinterpretation of the elders of the church, who, in the early periods of christianity, denounced theatrical exhibitions as irremediably connected with idolatry. This taint in the public estimation has been greatly maintained by the legal position of the majority of the class, and the consequent deterioration of the art. It is a sign of the height of civilization, when one class is ready to abandon an hereditary conventional superiority over another, or even to abolish invidious

distinctions not arising from inherent qualities ; but this sign of refinement is not the characteristic of the present age, notwithstanding its vast claims to liberality. Nothing can obliterate such prejudices but a long and steady course of respectability, and this it is at present scarcely possible for the majority of the profession to pursue ; and therefore it is that the regeneration of the theatre is so important to actors. Until the pursuit of the majority is legalised, and put into a position to enable men of education and talent to derive the same estimation and emolument from it, as from any other intellectual employment, it is in vain to hope for a reform. This alone can be done by giving the same freedom to it as to all other professions, and thus widening the field of success, and destroying the petty impediments that at present encumber the way.

The situation of the intellectual actor seems to be worse than ever. He shifts from theatre to theatre, and is associated, at the will of his manager, with horses and wild beasts. He is made to partake of the risk of the loss at the theatre where he is, though he has no share in the gains beyond his stipulated salary. He is the first to suffer ; and it now seems a common proceeding to declare half or almost no salaries at the end of the week, provided the houses have fallen off. The injustice of making him thus participate in the risk is so much the greater, as it is incurred for the most part upon a portion of the

speculation in which he is in no way concerned. The manager ventures some thousands in a spectacle, and if it fails of effect, the regular actor immediately feels it in the reduction of his salary, or perhaps its total loss. He thus runs the risk of the three companies incorporated under one management, and the failure of the operatic, melodramatic, or pantomimic company involves him in ruin. Was he playing in a theatre specially devoted to his branch of the art, he would at all events incur only the risk of his own pursuit. It may be said that he participates in their success; but this, were it so, would be equally unjust to the others; and it is not the case, as at the utmost it only enables him to gain his stipulated salary.

All this is only one of the hydra heads of the monopoly. The patent theatres involve such a risk of capital, that capitalists avoid them, and their managers have latterly been mere speculators with little or nothing to lose. Theatrical management has thus become a species of gambling, and the most honourable only pay when their receipts permit them. The patent theatres have thus virtually become share-theatres of the worst kind, for if they are ever so successful the actor only gets his salary; whereas, if they are the reverse, he loses every thing by the bankruptcy, or insolvency, of the lessee.

It is not only in pocket that the regular actor is a sufferer by the patent theatres being made mere exhibition places for music, scenery, and extraordi-

nary performances—but he also suffers in reputation and personal independence. He is sacrificed to every novelty, and either forced out of his line, or entirely thrown aside. Even if his class of drama is performed, if he is not, or is not esteemed to be, a first-rate actor, his part is sacrificed to heighten the effect of the prominent performer; and in the new plays he is merely considered as a foil to the “leading tragedian.” The system also engenders the meanest intrigues and the pettiest despotism.

The deterioration in the art of acting may also be traced to the same source. The impetus given to melodrama and farce by the law allowing only that class of dramas at the great majority of the theatres, has fostered it to the exclusion of the drama of character and passion; and the country theatres principally performing the inferior kind, there are no schools for acting left. Even in London, the actors of the patent theatres have deteriorated, and Farren is cited by the writers of the press as a proof of the destruction of good acting by such means, and Charles Mathews as an instance of not having a good school wherein to acquire his art. Several actors of tolerable natural ability have been educated at the minor metropolitan houses only, and though now engaged at the regular theatres, are totally unacquainted with the real drama of the country, or as it is technically phrased, “are not up in the stock parts.” The business of the sterling plays, which is mostly traditional, and origi-

nally derived from the supervision of the dramatist, is being lost; and it was very justly observed by one of the newspapers, that the "business of 'Much Ado about Nothing,' was evidently not known at Drury Lane."

The size of the patent theatres is also excessively injurious to actors, requiring an union of bodily and mental powers in one individual that reduces the chances of success considerably. Even to the very few whose "physique" is sufficient for "the wilderness," it is very injurious, seducing them into rant and exaggeration; and to many very imaginative and passionate actors, it must present an impassable barrier.

Such being the state of the case, it seems difficult to understand how actors, attached to the intellectual, or indeed any, portion of the drama, can hesitate as to the effect of the monopoly. Were it removed, there can be no doubt that three or four of the lesser theatres would immediately devote themselves to the regular drama, and capitalists would be found, who are now restrained by the state of the law, to afford means to enact it properly. It is not the ability of a theatrical "star" that is required to enact a good play, but the combination of an intelligent set of actors, who can relish and express the merits of the author. As at present performed illegally at the minor theatres, it is certainly no gratification to see it enacted by a second-rate melo-

dramatic company, with one tolerable actor as “a star.”

The public, which is as prone to follow good as bad example, would soon recognise the better from the worse, and such is the indestructibility of the drama that it would quickly revive, in spite of the long oppression it has endured. Amongst the other advantages to actors of a number of moderate sized theatres over two immense ones, would be the steadiness and respectability it would give the actor by keeping him constantly before the public at one theatre, and thus enable him to attain that most desirable of all things in English society, “a local habitation and a name.” He would not then be confounded with the vagabond conduct of a mob of inferior performers, horse-riders, and menagerie men; he would not be involved in the extensive speculation of pageants. He would belong to a band of intellectual men, who would know how to maintain their station from the aggressions of vulgar charlatanism, and they would have, at all events, to be under the guidance of educated men, for none other could conduct such a theatre prosperously. The number of theatres of the like kind would secure an opportunity to rising talent, and a security against managerial oppression; and, without incurring the charge of promising a theatrical “millenium,” it may be safely said that the destruction of the monopoly, and the consequent distribution of

the audiences and the various species of the drama to a greater number of smaller theatres, would give the actor a wider means of success, a freer market for his talents, a more permanent means of perfecting himself in his art, a steadier, if not a higher, remuneration, a better school of instruction, and altogether a firmer and more reputable station in society.

CHAPTER XI.

THE EFFECT OF THE MONOPOLY ON
DRAMATIC LITERATURE.

The Abandonment of the High Drama—The Law fosters the Worst kind of Drama—The Labours of Dramatic Composition—The Impediments of the Dramatist—Fate of Five-Act Plays—The Arrogance of Success—The Better Drama discouraged—The Historical Painter and the Dramatist—The Difficulties of the High Dramatist—The Neglect of Genius.

ONE of the greatest evils of monopoly is the liability of its abuse, and of all monopolies the theatrical has been the most abused. The patentees have claimed exclusively the privilege of giving to the public the genuine and highest drama, but they have also distorted this privilege into the right of withholding it. All the licenses, and even the patents of Charles II., infer that the privilege granted would be exercised, and not merely made a plea for preventing the exhibition of the genuine drama. The holders of the patents and their lessees, however, have considered themselves as in no way bound to encourage and

promote the genuine drama, but have only exercised their exclusive grants to turn their theatres into popular exhibition places. Not a single foreign or native monstrosity has appeared but it has been eagerly sought after by the managers of the large theatres to bring money to their treasuries ; and in this proceeding they have had to run races with the minor houses, by whom they have frequently been forestalled. Rope dancers, ladder-walkers, cats and dogs, monkeys, and men-imitators of monkeys, any body or any thing that it was conjectured could attract, have been snapped at by them. Murphy was offered the price of a first-rate drama to lecture on the weather, and the Bayaderes were only prevented appearing on their boards by the superior activity of Mr. Yates. With what pretence of justice, after a century of conduct of this kind, they can lay claim to any exclusive privilege it is difficult to imagine. The maintenance of a monopoly, which is only exercised to the destruction of the production it was meant to foster, is an outrage on common sense and justice so obvious, that if once fairly brought before the legislature it must be abolished.

Our present object is to trace the operation of this vile system upon the literature of the drama, which, to whatever cause it may be attributed, every one acknowledges has dwindled to a state as injurious as it is contemptible. In developing the results of the exclusive principles, we find them operating in a variety of ways, but all to the same

injurious result. It has already been shown how it affects actors, and it operates in the same mode upon the dramatists—creating a demand for inferior productions, and increasing the difficulties of the higher class of writers. The law says to all the theatres—play burletta, farces, melodrames, dance, sing, fight mock battles, show wild beasts, enact ‘Tom and Jerry’ and ‘Jack Sheppard,’ as much and as often as you please, but perform no moral or poetical plays without our license, and but at two or three places. The result, of course, is, that the dramatic talent and inclination is turned into the worst and meanest channel; and the taste of the public is consequently gradually lowered to it, until it becomes insensible to, and almost incapable of, enjoying the higher and purer kind.

The martyrdom which a writer of the higher drama has to endure is greater than in any other mental endeavour, not even excepting the historical painter. To compose a five-act play that shall produce its just effect is a labour which none can comprehend who have not attempted it. To produce an homogeneous work from a variety of minute incidents and events—to construct a plot that shall be interesting, but not intricate—to develop character with profundity and simplicity—to clothe the strongest throes of the passions in the immortal language and figures of the imagination—to create with such art that it shall be received for nature—is not the result of an idle outpouring of a rhapsodical

brain, but the united effort of the highest faculties of man. It is not given to the grandest genius to produce such a work with ease, not even to Shakspeare. It is conceived at first rudely and dimly, and but by glimpses gradually unfolds itself to the artist. Fitfully do its noblest parts present themselves, frequently fading ere the lower faculty can fix them in words. New powers present themselves as he proceeds in his work; and the perturbed and glowing imagination "bodies forth" a variety of forms, which the nice instinct of genius has to shade into keeping with the noble whole. That which is the effect of frequent efforts and various inspirations has to be fused into "one entire and perfect chrysolite," so that it may come on the auditor and spectator as the continuous emanation of one conception. Having poured forth the stores of collected observation, having given, by his instinctive genius, substance and imperishable existence to the rhapsodical visions of his imaginative faculty; having wound up his whole mental being to the strongest and most potent exercise of its combined faculties; having instructed himself in the lower art of what will affect those he addresses, he completes his play—the result of a severe exercise of his highest faculties, and the produce of a mental labour great as the mind of man can undergo. In all this he has been sustained by the strong flow of his energies; and if they have ever flagged, he has renewed them by an ardour kindled at the imperish-

able fame of his immortal predecessors. The only reward he can know, is acted success—the knowledge of his might to move the minds of his fellow-men—the consciousness of a noble aim, and a solid reliance on his abiding fame.

In the present state of theatrical affairs, when such a drama is composed, the miseries of its author begin. Warm from composition, and elated by the consciousness of the merit of his work, and having submitted his production to rigid revision, he proceeds to get it acted. One of the two patent theatres is his aim, and if he is wealthy or well recommended, he obtains an interview, or rather an audience, with the manager, who, amidst a bevy of scene-painters, mechanists, dancers, musicians, &c. at last desires that the dramatic aspirant be introduced. He is received with a kind of theatrical royalty, and treated with an ill-concealed condescension. The manager assures him that he is overwhelmed with business, and implies that none but intellect of the highest order and a frame of herculean vigour could endure what he has to go through. Having thus sufficiently abased, as he conceives, the mind of the dramatist, the subject of the interview is entered upon, not without frequently-renewed hints of the valuable time the manager is thus squandering. The nature of the performance is then inquired—if a tragedy, is it domestic or classic? Has it a fine female part for Miss ——? Is the leading character calculated to display the abilities

of Mr. ——? Is it a full piece? What are the situations? Wherein rests its force? If these should, by a miracle, be answered to his satisfaction, he is delighted with the opportunity of encouraging young merit—he has always done so. Nobody regrets, more than he does, the vile taste of the public for show and scenery—but what can he do? The overwhelmed dramatist is then assured his work shall be put into the hands of a very first-rate man to be examined. He can make no promises of acceptance—he has already heaps of dramas—three or four first-rate tragedies—seven or eight comedies—besides several very clever operas and melodramas, one from a member of parliament, another from the very first novelist of the day—besides numerous pieces from the leading actors—and one (but it must not be mentioned) from the greatest and most inexorable critic of the age. This *must* be attended to—not that he thinks much of it—but if it is not, the Easter piece on which he has spent two thousand pounds, will be pronounced a disgrace to Bartholomew Fair, and he will be ruined. However, he shall be very happy to give his very earliest attention to the present “*piece*,” which he is sure, from the party introducing the dramatist, must possess very considerable merit. The bewildered author is then bowed out, and left to wander over the stage amidst the perils of trap-doors and sliding-boards.

What will follow this interview it is difficult to predicate. He may never hear of the manager or

his work again. He may have it returned with a fulsome letter, with another author's production instead of his own. If by any extraordinary circumstances the play should be approved, either because it has very applicable popular allusions (perhaps to the Queen's marriage), or the other great expectations may have missed fire, then a polite letter is received by the dramatist, the play possesses great genius, and the manager "will be happy to avail himself of it when circumstances may suit." The author now fancies success and fame are his; all his toils are rewarded; all his doubts of his own capacities, which had begun to oppress him, clear away, and he sees his name enrolled amongst the acknowledged dramatists. Miserable dupe!—now comes his bitterest suffering. He waits in ill-repressed impatience weeks, perhaps months; at last the welcome summons arrives; the parts are perhaps cast—the scenery appointed—the name even announced—the puffs preliminary issued of "a truly noble tragedy, &c.,"—when lo! suddenly the whole vision melts away—the manager is never to be seen—the porters are surly or rude—the season closes, and the manager, perhaps, by great dexterity, is caught by the unhappy dramatist getting into the Dover mail for a continental trip. He was about to write—the most unforeseen circumstances had arisen to prevent the bringing out that most beautiful tragedy—the leading actor had taken a sudden disgust to the part—or it would have been ruin to stop the

successful career of the gentleman who walked on his head over the pit, or of the new singer—the member for —— had sent in a splendid melo-drame, and he brought, by his private connexion, three nights certain to the whole boxes—the dramatist of the day had been reconciled, and he was obliged to take his new play—there was, moreover, a disrelish in the public mind for the tragic, it was not the rage just now; and, in fine, a theatre is a mercantile speculation, and the great outlay, the caprice of the public, the difficulty of knowing what the critics wanted—he did not think they knew themselves—must plead his excuse with any reasonable mind; he did not wish to behave unhandsomely to any man—and if Mr. —— would bring him a good broad farce, with three old men's parts and a country boy, he would accept it at once—next season.

The dramatist has now nothing to do but to hang or drown himself, or burn the result of all his labours. Probably, about two years have now elapsed from the completion of his play, and he finds himself with nothing but a heap of bitter disappointment for his trouble. What becomes of him no one knows or cares, but he vanishes from the visible world, and “may hang, or starve, or drown,” for what it matters. His friends pity or despise him, and he is set down as that most baited of human monsters, “a disappointed author.” If he prints his productions, the critics pass a hasty sentence on a portion of

them, and the rest are divided between the author's friends and the butter-shop.

It will be said that this picture is overcharged; but names and dates could be given to verify instances of the same kind—not only one but many. Does not the long delay in producing such a play as 'Mary Stuart' (formerly Rizzio), prove the case? Where is the 'Spanish Maid?' the 'Spendthrift?' Will Mr. Macready give a list of the plays he partially accepted, or that were presented and refused on grounds like the foregoing? The editor of the 'Monthly Magazine' tells us, "There was even a joke current that Messrs. Macready, Talfourd, and Bulwer, had met in private conclave for the support of the legitimate drama—the two latter engaging to *write* it, and the former to *act* it. The manuscripts of less favoured individuals were turned over to Mr. Kenney, to read or not as he pleased, with a *certainty* of their never being used. No wonder that great negligence was observed towards these unfortunate bantlings. Some of them were even lost. Among the missing there was *one*, at least, on which Mr. Macready had expressed a very high opinion, and the same may have been the case with others."

Amongst other wrongs and insults to dramatists (and Mr. Macready erred particularly in this), is the continual encouragement to any one whose play is noticed, or application answered, to write another; thus inducing an injurious and useless expenditure of mind, and consumption of time, it being well

known that the arrangements of the theatre preclude the possibility of their being accepted when completed. It has been said, indeed, by an eminent literary man of the day, that if Mr. Macready's answers to authors had all been thrown in a heap together, they would equally apply to any one, no matter how directed, and that they each would contain this inducement to write. This thoughtless conduct arises from the arrogance of success, and an utter contempt and disregard for the literature of the drama except as a medium for theatrical display. It is one of the worst results of that system which gives the successful actor thousands a-year, whilst the author cannot get hundreds. The actor also is by no means without the prejudices of his nation, and he cannot help feeling, and, generally, grossly displaying, his estimate of the difference of pecuniary circumstances between the dramatist of the suburbs and himself of a fashionable square. He has also generally so far advanced in classical literature as to be able to construe "*irritabile genus*," a phrase which he takes literally and applies superciliously to authors, who are to be alone controlled, as he thinks, by the coarsest flattery, or the most tremendous "crow-bar."

Such being the state of circumstances (and innumerable proofs can, and, if necessary, shall be given, to show the case, instead of being exaggerated, is not half stated), it is apparent that the better kind of drama is being sacrificed to the evil results of

monopoly. The large theatres, aiming at every thing, cannot afford to encourage it, and if they could, there is not sufficient space to give dramatists of the better kind a fair opportunity. The worser and coarser kind only have a chance, and the fate of those who attempt more is such as has been here depicted.

With a knowledge of all these circumstances and irrefragable proofs of their existence, it is hard for the dramatist to hear (but sufferance is his badge), and that, too, at the moment that his play is refused, "that there is no difficulty in getting a play upon the stage that is likely to succeed," and that at least he (the manager) "has the *consolation* of knowing, that he never has declined one the eventful success of which has convicted him of partial judgment." As a refutation to this, we would refer to the unbiassed and general opinion of the 'Sea Captain,' and to our confidence in the ultimate success of Mr. Leigh Hunt's play; as also of 'The Spanish Maid,' 'The Spendthrift,' and five others of the very first mark and likelihood. One of these it "grieved Mr. Macready to decline from circumstances," and of all was expressed a just admiration, in defiance of the assertion "that there is no difficulty in getting a play upon the stage likely to succeed."

It is not meant to blame Mr. Macready, or any theatrical manager, for not accepting plays unsuitable to his purposes and views, but to denounce that



system which renders a living national drama impossible. At the same time it is unworthy of any man to claim the honours of a patron of art when his conduct is that of a mere trader, and to demand the honours of a reformer and a martyr when he is only a copyist and a speculator.

The dramatist has also to endure the scorns of the vulgar, as being an unsuccessful author, without even a trial ; his refusal at the great theatres, though arising from all the causes enumerated, and the possession of the stage by a few, being invariably attributed to want of ability. Men capable of appreciating the circumstances even join in this injustice, and an artist of considerable skill in his department of art has been heard frequently to reiterate that the dramatist had nothing to complain of. This, from one also devoted to the fine arts, must be peculiarly annoying to the dramatic writer, and it would be well to put him in the place of the man he thus derides. Let him spend twelvemonths in the production of an historical painting, let him have undergone all the labour of mind and body to produce a work of genius, and then let a law be passed by which he could only present it at two places for exhibition and sale ; let him be told that nothing but caricatures and curiosities answered at one place, and at the other that they kept their own painters for what little demand there might be for such "pieces;" let him be told that, if he tried again, he must put his figures in this or that attitude, that

he must use one particular kind of colour, and that he must follow the examples required by Mr. Strut, who was the principal person there; thus refused, let him take his picture back to his garret, as the law would not permit him to show it any where but at two places already occupied, and then let him be told by a successful playwright that the historical painter had nothing to complain of.

This is truly the case of the regular dramatist. Excluded from the patent theatres, unlike other authors or artists, he has no market. He cannot go from publisher to publisher, or print for himself, like the novelist, for unacted plays will not sell; and, indeed, if constructed to act, are not well adapted for mere reading. He risks his labour and his genius on two throws of the die, and if they fail, he loses all, whilst he sees the vaudevillist and the melodramatist have the whole field to themselves. Did not tastes merge into passions, the intellect would never be attracted to the subject, but it has ever been the glory of genius to contend with apparent impossibilities, and to devote itself to art for the sake of art alone; not only forsaking the voluptuous and the agreeable, but enduring all the penalties of those who forsake Mammon; and, above all, the insolence of success, more arrogant, as it is, than even the insolence of office.

The dramatists and the actors have one interest, and if they will but pursue their claim, it is impossible that the legislature can any longer refuse them

justice. The public and the public taste are also interested in the question, and if attention is once roused, its mighty fiat will soon be issued against the system.

We cannot more forcibly conclude the present chapter than by using the words of Mr. Horne, as given by him in a very able introduction to a new edition of 'Schlegel's Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature,' in which brief but comprehensive essay he has embodied the philosophy and argument of the question :—

“ An easy access to all the stages—all being equally permitted (as every sane mind must naturally think they ought) to accept the finest dramas they can obtain—and speedy production of accepted pieces, will afford the only chance of restoring the English drama. In such a case we should find the pure dramatic ore of many writers, at present, in most instances, quite unknown to the stage, soon wrought into available and influential works. But, under the patent system of exclusion, the author of the 'Bride's Tragedy' is heard of no more; the fine execution and high promise of the 'Jew of Arragon' and 'Woman's Love,' are suffered to die out of mind; and the author of the 'Provost of Bruges,' though it was a successful tragedy, gives up the time-wasting task of again finding the opening. Of recent unacted publications, it is not to be doubted that a most intense dramatic excellence (notwithstanding the perversity of construction in 'Andrea

of Hungary' and 'Giovanni of Naples'), exists in Landor; that D'Israeli, and the author of the 'Lords of Ellingham,' possess dramatic capacities that entitle them to a fair trial before the public; while the passionate imagination and pathos of George Stephens seem to spring out of the ground like one of the old Elizabethan dramatists revived."

We cannot also refrain from quoting the same author's statement of the indestructibility of the drama.

"It has been argued that the drama has done its office, and that highly educated people are becoming too intellectually refined to enjoy any such exhibitions. Which is the class—who are they who compose this body assumed to be thus intellectually superior to the acted drama? Is it the aristocracy? They prefer the opera, the scenery, the wardrobe, and heroic Eglintonian pageantry. Is it the middle classes? They are the very followers and only supporters of the true drama. Is it the working classes? The large minority delight in the impassioned drama, and humbly reverence its power; the majority flock to the external shows. There is no such class; nor can a score of analytic philosophers, whose tastes require a more tranquil food, constitute any sufficient foundation for such an argument. The true drama must be indestructible, because it is based on indestructible principles of human nature. Its elevating appeal, when properly made, must ever be successful so long as the elements of humanity remain unchanged. Passion and imagination may require some change in the forms of their food, but its substance must remain the same, or their existence be compromised. True dramatic power can only cease to produce its effect where humanity ceases to feel. The exercise and effect of such power may not be confined to the theatre; but it must always produce its natural effect in a theatre when appropriately represented. Progress of refinement, theories of philosophy, changes in taste, and caprices of fashion, must all succumb before the commanding spirit that searches and uplifts the heart of man, and shakes with corresponding fire the Promethean tree that ramifies throughout his mortal being."

CHAPTER XII.

THE PROBABLE MEANS OF AMELIORATING THE STATE OF THE DRAMA AND OF ITS PROFESSORS.

Evil of the Monopoly to the Public—The Invalidity of the Patents—The State of the Law—Applying to the Legislature—The Law must be enlarged or enforced—Bubble Companies—Patentees no Exclusive Rights—Perpetual Insolvency of Lessees of the Patent Theatres—Public Taste created by Talent—Royal Academy for Dramatic Art.

THE benefit arising to actors and dramatists by throwing open the whole of the theatres to the best kind of performances, has been illustrated, and it remains but to say a few words on the advantages accruing from such a proceeding to the public.

The very extent of the metropolis seems itself an overpowering argument in its favour; and why the inhabitants of Maida Hill and the Edgware-road, the immense districts of Marylebone and Camden Town, Holloway and Hackney, Mile-end and Poplar, the Kent-road, Camberwell and Brixton, Clapham, Vauxhall, Pimlico, Brompton, Kensington, and Bayswater, should be compelled to travel up to the neighbourhood of Covent-garden to see a play

of Shakspeare's or Knowles's legally performed, is a question certainly very unsatisfactorily answered by saying that it pleased Charles II. to command that, during his reign, there should only be two theatres in the metropolis, his motive being, that the performance of theatrical entertainments should afford a means of living to two of his private friends.

The consideration of the origin of the patents here forces itself upon us, and it will appear by the history of these documents in the eighth chapter, that if they had any vitality beyond the life of the grantor, they have been violated by the laws themselves. They were granted not to give any one kind of drama particularly to the patentees, but to circumscribe the number of theatres. They do not say that the regular drama is alone actable by the patentees, but that "all entertainments of the stage whatsoever" shall be alone performed by the two patentees. The subsequent statutes, and particularly the 25th of George the Second, by which all the minor theatres are licensed to perform any other entertainments of the stage but the regular drama, is, therefore, a total annulment of the principle of the patents. It does the very thing the patents specially forbid, viz., allows "divers companies of players" to represent "entertainments of the stage within our cities of London and Westminster, and the suburbs thereof." The only exception it made in favour of the two patent theatres was the handing them over to the Lord Chamberlain, allowing them

to perform under his control, and at his will and pleasure. How the patents can ever be referred to after this complete annihilation of them by the acts of parliament, seems unaccountable. They, indeed, have never been pleaded in any legal proceedings, the informations against the minor theatres always being laid under the 25th George the Second, and the other statutes. Some stress has at times been attempted to be placed on the fact of the personal sanction of the King and of the Prince of Wales to what was called the "Opera Arrangement" in 1792, wherein the validity of the patents was acknowledged; but as the private acts of the King, much less of the Prince of Wales, do not carry any legal authority, except performed through the medium of the Privy Council, it is quite a chimerical argument. The statutes have not acknowledged them, and the crown lawyers have invariably decided that they are of no avail beyond the life of the grantor. Indeed, Mr. Charles Kemble, when examined before the Dramatic Committee, on being asked, "But what is the use of your patent rights if the Lord Chamberlain has the power of granting licenses for the legitimate drama anywhere he may think proper in Westminster?"—answers, "*Of none*—it is a great injury to us if he does it;" and subsequently acknowledges that it would be a breach of faith, and not of law, if other theatres were permitted to act the regular drama in Westminster. It appears, then, that the law stands thus:—Westminster is

placed under the jurisdiction of the Lord Chamberlain, and he may license or unlicense as many theatres as he chooses for any kind of drama within that city. Beyond that district, the 25th of George the Second, and the other statutes control the drama, and they, for particular and temporary political purposes, or, as Sir Robert Walpole expressed it on his introduction of the first bill, "to prevent the morals of the people from being corrupted by libidinous writers for the stage, to protect government from the attacks of disaffected or disappointed people through the same channel, and to shield private characters from the envenomed shaft of wicked wit, envy, and malevolence," permitted no plays to be performed without a license from the magistrates, and authorised them only to license places for "music and dancing, and other like entertainments of the stage."

Those interested, therefore, in the amelioration and elevation of the stage, appear to have only to call the attention of the legislature to the alteration of the circumstances of the drama, to the vast increase of the metropolis, and to the total cessation of the motives that induced these acts of parliament. They can have, surely, nothing to do in order to obtain an alteration of the law, but to point out the inefficacy and the injuriousness of its present state. The time is come when the law should either be so strictly enforced as to prevent all dramatic performances, except at the patent theatres, or else

repeal the acts, which being relaxed by the magistrates, permit a spurious drama that poisons instead of invigorates the public morals. With this proceeding the patentees have nothing to do. The law took it entirely out of their hands and power when it legislated on the subject, and it is entirely a question of public advantage and morality. If the patents have any validity, only two theatres can be allowed in London and the whole of the suburbs; and, indeed, only one, as by the deed of 1682, uniting the patents, one of them was voluntarily and completely annihilated. As before said, but it cannot be too often enforced, the advantage granted to the patentees by Charles the Second was not any particular species of the drama, but the entire monopoly of theatres. This right has been contravened by every subsequent sovereign, and, finally, totally abrogated by a succession of acts of parliament. In fact, the patentees have no right as patentees, and they know it. They fall back, as Mr. Charles Kemble did, on the assertion, that their "right is founded on a general belief on the part of those who have embarked their property in these concerns, on the faith of the royal word, and on the faith of the patent."

It is utterly incredible that those whose business it was to examine into the validity of these documents, and who doubtless had recourse to the highest legal authority, could imagine that there was any

property in the patent. The fact appears to be, that when the large theatres were so extravagantly rebuilt by the joint-stock proprietage, it was necessary to hold out this exclusive privilege of the patents as an inducement, and as a something whereon to rest a semblance of security to the subscribers for their enormous outlay; and this it was that made Mr. Whitbread and Mr. Sheridan think it worth while to pay twenty thousand pounds for what was called the Dormant Patent (Killigrew's), which, indeed, was dormant, having been annulled by mutual contract in 1682, declared void by William the Third, specially revoked by Anne, abrogated by the statutes of the Georges, and never having been made the least use of for upwards of one hundred and twenty-seven years. When Drury-lane was burned down, there was a debt of 500,000*l.*, and to compensate this there was nothing but the old materials and the insurance, amounting to 30,000*l.* The purchase-money of the patent was nothing in comparison of this debt, and the new subscribers would never have come forward without some plausible assurance of an ultimate return of their advances; but like other speculators, they should have looked to the validity of the security proposed, before embarking in the scheme, and have examined into the real value of this bit of old parchment before being deluded into a belief of its importance. As well might the numerous speculators in the various bubble compa-

nies claim a compensation from the public, on the plea "that they had a general belief" that they were safe speculations.

There is not a statute of the realm that has been a hundred years without being greatly modified, and yet Mr. Dunn, when asked "Do you consider Killigrew's patent eternal?" replies, "I believe it is." Every thing else may change, London stretch to treble its extent, tastes may alter, stipulations may be violated, but the immortal patents shall remain untouched, "amid the wreck of matter and the crush of worlds."

The question, however, of freedom to the drama, does not rest with these "eternal" documents, but with the legislature. That has chosen to say, there may be sixteen theatres instead of two in direct violation of the "merry monarch's" edict; and has now only to add that instead of playing a debasing, they shall have the opportunity of enacting a more elevating and instructing species of performance.

The very utmost that the most scrupulous regard for vested interests could demand, would be some slight immunity to the patentees. And to this there can be no claim, for they have, as the foregoing facts will prove, no exclusive rights, and if any among them have been deluded into the idea that they have, they should, like all other indiscreet persons, bear the result of their own imprudence. If the legislature were to listen to anything of the kind, they must think themselves very graciously

dealt with if the privilege of performing the regular drama in Westminster was left to them, the regions beyond that being declared perfectly free to perform any kind of entertainment. This would be giving them the full benefit of their obsolete patents, and be doing a tardy justice to the public; though even this limitation would be any thing but creditable to sound and enlightened legislation.

As in all cases of compensation some damage is supposed, it becomes necessary to examine how this plea could be established by the patentees. The first inquiry would naturally be, whether any one of the lessees gave a single hundred pounds a year more for either of the large theatres in consequence of this alleged exclusive privilege of performing the regular drama? Did Mr. Bunn, who never performed it? Did Mr. Elliston, who openly declared there was no such privilege, and who subsequently defied his old landlords by playing the regular drama in their despite at the Surrey Theatre? Did Mr. Osbaldiston, who took a minor company to Covent-garden? Or Mr. Hammond, who has done the same to Drury-lane? It may be said that Mr. Macready did; but he is the strongest instance of all to the contrary, for he made the risk and hazard of playing the regular drama a strong plea for paying less than any one else. Mr. Harris, the principal proprietor of Covent-garden Theatre, deposed, in the Court of Chancery, that this theatre did not gain a shilling by the regular drama from

1809 to 1821, but was supported by the Christmas pantomimes and those kind of performances. If such was the case during a period when so many excellent actors graced its boards, what must it not have lost by the regular drama from that period to the present? Mr. Bunn's balance-sheet speaks volumes; as would Captain Polhill's private accounts, and those of other capitalists.

It is evident that the renters and proprietors get nothing by the vaunted patents, and therefore cannot assert they would lose any thing by their formal abolishment. It seems, indeed, very probable that the two houses would let more profitably, if they were unencumbered by the patents, either for gladiatorial exhibitions, musical and public meetings, or some very extensive scientific or religious purposes. It was understood at one time that parties were in treaty with the proprietors with this view; and to this, sooner or later, must they come. The raising a claim, therefore, to clog the legislature in its honest enactments is preposterous, and cannot be maintained either on the plea of a recognised right or of a real injury.

It will doubtless be asked if the public take an interest in this matter, and whether they would frequent the theatres conducted on the new principle? It may safely be said that they would. And if it is again asked why the Brixton and Clapham people do not frequent the Surrey Theatre, it may be an-

swered by saying, that although that and other minor theatres occasionally violate the law and play the regular drama, yet their whole arrangements are essentially inferior, and are not made with a view to a high class of performance. Were the regular drama legalised, and capitalists could feel secure in investing their money in such undertakings, there can be no doubt that we should shortly see such a theatre as the Haymarket, at the least, in each of the great suburb districts, and they would soon attract educated and respectable audiences.

The want of actors and dramatists is then urged, but it is a principle that may safely be relied upon in such a dense population and state of society as ours, that the demand will always create a supply. Genius is scarce, but talent is always plentiful, and let it have but an opportunity of exerting itself, and give it fair means of being trained, and there will be no grounds to fear any deficiency of supply. Talent seems to engender talent, and if any illustration of this were needed, the newspaper press would afford an unanswerable proof of the truth of this proposition.

It was the fashion, some years since, to argue that if any other than the two theatres were allowed, the good actors would be spread about at the lesser theatres. The reverse of this, however, proves to be the case, and at the present time, companies from the smaller houses occupy the two patent theatres. If such is the case under the present disabilities, what

might we not expect from a better system where the smaller theatres would be good schools for the larger?

Whilst upon the subject of schools of acting, one argument may be noticed, which, though of little validity, is frequently urged in favour of the monopoly: namely, that when theatrical performances were more strictly confined to two theatres there were a better class of actors and writers. With regard to the latter, this is an entire mistake, and with respect to the former, the multiplicity of talent arose from a principle that never varies, namely, that a demand creates a supply, where the raw material is attainable. The theatre was reputable and profitable, and talent of course was thus drawn to it. If it is said that the theatre was successful because it was confined to two places of representation—the history of the drama contradicts it, and we refer those who assert this to Chapter VIII. of this work, or to the pamphlet on “The Past and Present State of Dramatic Art and Literature,” for a refutation. Besides, were it the fact, the legislature has scarcely the power, in the present state of the metropolis and the population, to again confine “all kinds of theatrical representations” to Drury-lane and Covent-garden; though even that would be less injurious than the present anomalous state of the law.

Before taking leave of the subject of the mode of raising the school of acting, it is impossible not to indulge in a suggestion that has long engaged our

attention—namely, the founding a school of instruction for the various professors of the art. His majesty George IV. founded a royal academy for music; and were the present gracious monarch to found a royal academy for the dramatic art, it would be a useful and popular grant. Painting and sculpture received their encouragement in the previous reign, music in the next, and the drama, ever the latest to be noticed, may claim favour in this. It is not meant to overwhelm it with a corporation that would in time become the tool of a clique, but merely to give to young practitioners that means of acquiring the elements of their profession that are now within the means of all other pursuers of the fine arts. One of the great causes of the degradation of the stage, as a profession, is the influx of a number of disreputable persons into it, who fly to it from loose and profligate dispositions, and diseased and depraved imaginations. This is one of the unfortunate pursuits that it is deemed requires no previous training to enter upon, the received opinion being, that any person totally incompetent for any other may adopt this with success.

The necessity of an institution like the one now proposed was obviated in the early times of the drama by a variety of assistances that no longer exist. The actors who were not dramatists in Elizabeth's time were generally youths brought up in the choirs of the cathedral, where they acquired one great requisite, a musical modulation of the voice.

They were also carefully instructed in their art by educated men, or the great dramatists themselves. Subsequently the eminent actors took apprentices, many of whom proved the brightest ornaments of the stage. Kynaston and Hart were apprentices of the older actors, and handed down the traditional business and imaginings of the original dramatists and artists. Thus was given a means of reaping the advantage of accumulated talent, and we find its result in the abundance of good actors that existed together.

The institution proposed should be founded and endowed by the Queen, and be patronised and supported by the cultivated and enlightened portion of the aristocracy. Schools for learning the elements of the art should be opened, and the celebrated actors and dramatists should be appointed professors to lecture on the various branches of the art. Amongst the acquirements more particularly to be learned would be, graceful and effective carriage, gesture, and enunciation, though only the elements could be attempted to be enforced, sufficient aid being given to rouse the taste and fancy of the scholar. So much of fencing, music and dancing, as are requisite, and stage demeanour, would also form a principal portion of the needful instruction. Such an institution, keeping watch as it would over those who were admitted, would do much to purify the profession, and draw a strong line between the large mob of assistants and the really educated

actor. It would prevent the pursuit being overstocked with imbeciles, and raise it in public estimation. It would no longer be pursued as a disgrace, and as an employment that deprived a man of all intercourse with respectable society until he had obtained metropolitan notoriety.

It is not meant to assert that genius could be produced by such a means, but talent undoubtedly might; and it would be much more for the advantage of the drama, and much more agreeable to the audience, to have a talented company that played with taste and judgment a fine play, in a level manner, than even the highest single ability, with miserable assistants.

The idea of such an institution can only be thrown out here; and those who are influential in the profession as actors or dramatists can alone carry it out. There can be little doubt, however, that the illustrious personage alluded to, who has already manifested a very laudable taste for the drama, would, if properly applied to, extend her powerful and graceful patronage to a noble art too long the object of neglect and even persecution. Such an example would elicit a corresponding feeling in the higher classes, and with the expense of very little labour and cost, a foundation might be laid to promote the undertaking, that would raise the art at once to its proper position with other intellectual and tasteful pursuits.

The writer's labours have now drawn to an end,

and, in taking leave of his readers, he has only to assure them that he has but endeavoured to throw out his own views for others to work on as they may deem fit. He has had but one motive, and that is to benefit the drama, and if he has gained one influential mind in the cause, or elicited any ideas that may be beneficial to it, he is more than satisfied. He has spoken frankly and freely on all points, but has been careful to assert no fact that he cannot maintain, nor any argument that he did not deem feasible. If he has appeared to speak depreciatingly of any person, he has only done so to render justice to all parties; and he hopes that it will not be asserted, because he may have alluded to some weaknesses or errors, that he is incapable of giving credit in those particulars where it may be due.

FINIS.

APPENDIX.

OPINIONS OF SIR WALTER SCOTT AND OTHER EMINENT
WRITERS,

On the State of the Drama.

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

"WHERE then are we to look for that unfortunate counterbalance, which confessedly depresses the national drama, in despite of the advantages we have enumerated? We apprehend it will be found in the monopoly possessed by two large establishments, which, unhappily for the progress of national taste, and, it is said, without any equivalent advantage to the proprietors, now enjoy the exclusive privilege of dramatic representation. It must be distinctly understood, that we attribute these disadvantages to the *system* itself, and by no means charge them upon those who have the administration of either theatre. The proprietors have a right to enjoy what the law invests in them; and the managers have probably discharged their duty to the public as honourably as circumstances would admit of; but the system has led into errors which affect public taste and even public morals.

"The monopoly of the two large theatres has operated unfavourably both upon theatrical writers and performers. The former have been in many instances, if not absolutely excluded from the scene, yet deterred from approaching it, in the same manner as men avoid attempting to pass through a narrow wicket, which is perpetually thronged by an importunate crowd. Allowing the managers of these two theatres, judging in the first and in the last resort, to be possessed of the full discrimination necessary to a task so difficult; supposing them to be at all times alike free from partiality and from prejudice; still the number of plays thrust upon their hands must prevent their doing equal justice to all, and must frequently deter a man of real talents, either from pride or modesty, from entering a competition clogged with delay, solicitation, and other circumstances, *haud subeunda ingenio suo*.

"If, however, it were possible so to arrange interests, that the patents of the present theatres should cover four, or even six, of smaller size, dedicated to the same purpose, we conceive that more good actors would be found, and more good plays written; and, as a necessary consequence, that good society would attend the theatre in sufficient numbers to enforce respect to decency. The access to the stage would be rendered easy to both authors and actors; and although this might give scope to some rant and false taste, it could not fail to call forth much excellence, that must otherwise remain latent or repressed. The theatres would be relieved of the heavy expense at present incurred, in paying performers who do not play; and in each maintaining three theatrical corps for the separate purposes of tragedy, comedy, and musical pieces; only one of which can be productive labourers on the same evening, though all must be supported and paid. According to our more thrifty plan, each of these companies would be earning at the same time the fruits of their professional industry. The hours of representation, in one or

more of these theatres, might be rendered more convenient to those in high life, whilst the middling classes might enjoy a rational and classical entertainment after the business of the day."

QUARTERLY REVIEW.

"But these are obvious evils, the natural consequence of that monopoly, unknown in the history of the early stage, which having begun by doing its utmost to ruin the drama, with more than poetic justice ends by ruining the proprietors. Hence the absolute necessity of show and decoration in theatres, which have outgrown the ordinary faculties both of actors and spectators; where no one can be heard without an exertion of voice, almost always fatal to its melody, and to its variety of intonation; and where no one can hear without an overstrained attention, the effort of which is often so painful as to destroy all the interest of the scene. Hence, a more serious evil! In order, at all events, to people this enormous edifice, those disgraceful arrangements, which would not be endured in the most dissolute capital of the Continent, and which seem intended to justify the moral denunciations of those who entertain religious scruples about the stage. Hence, at all events to dazzle the eyes, the body of the house is lighted and gilt with such excessive splendour as to be highly detrimental to scenic effect, which requires that the light should be concentrated as much as possible upon the stage; while the scenery, obliged to out-glitter the body of the theatre, can rarely venture on chaste or quiet colouring. These, however, as we have observed, are obvious evils; but we are inclined to take into the account another circumstance, little suspected to be highly prejudicial to the genuine drama—the perfection of the histrionic art. The actor, from a subordinate part of the general illusion, has usurped the principal, and claims as his own the whole undivided interest of the audience. With our simple ancestors, the play was everything; the actor, we conceive, of much less importance.

* * * * *

"We will venture to predict, that so long as the dramatic writer is sunk to a subordinate station in the general *corps dramatique*, second to the mechanist and scene-painter, as well as to the actor—only in somewhat higher relative position than the opera poet to the composer of music—so long as even a really good play, feebly or inadequately performed, would have no chance of success, so long the drama will remain far below the poetic average of the elder period."

EDINBURGH REVIEW.

"In many countries the government actually expends large sums on the theatre. In other states, the rulers of which we are apt to stigmatise as tyrants, much money and great attention are bestowed to facilitate and encourage the amusements of the people. Such a disposition of the public treasure is, no doubt, contrary to the genius of our constitution; it is not to be expected or desired; but we may reasonably demand that the sources of innocent, or rather of instructive recreation, should not be dried up rashly, or wantonly diverted by unjust and pernicious interference. * * * There were more theatres in London formerly, in proportion to the population, than in any other city in Europe; now there are fewer; for by an odious and unjust monopoly the number is restricted; nor is this, however grievous, the only restraint to which the drama is subject.

"The present age is too much inclined to make human life, in every department, resemble a great lottery, in which there are a very few enormous prizes, and all the rest of the tickets are blanks. The stage has not escaped the evil we complain of; on the contrary, it is a striking example of the mischief of this unequal partition. The public are of opinion, that it is impossible to reward a small number of actors too highly, and to pay the remainder at too low a rate; to neglect the latter enough, or to be sufficiently attentive to the former. On our stage, therefore, the inferior parts, and, indeed, all

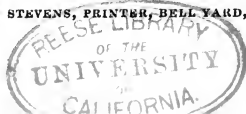
but one or two, and especially in tragedies, where the inequality is more intolerable, and more inexcusable, are sustained in a very inadequate manner. In foreign theatres, on the contrary, and especially in France, the whole performance is more equal, and consequently more agreeable. There is, perhaps, less difference than is commonly supposed between the best performers, and those in the next class. Whatever the difference be, it is an inconvenience and imperfection that ought to be palliated: but we aggravate it. The first-rate actor always does his best, because the audience expect it, and reward him with their applause, but no one cares for the performer of second-rate talents. The general effect, therefore, of our tragedies is very unsatisfactory; for that is far greater where all the characters are tolerably well supported than where there is one good actor, and all the other parts are inhumanly murdered. This latter is too often the case on our stage; for with us art does little, nothing being taught systematically. The French players, on the contrary, are thoroughly drilled, and well instructed in every requisite."

SCHLEGEL.

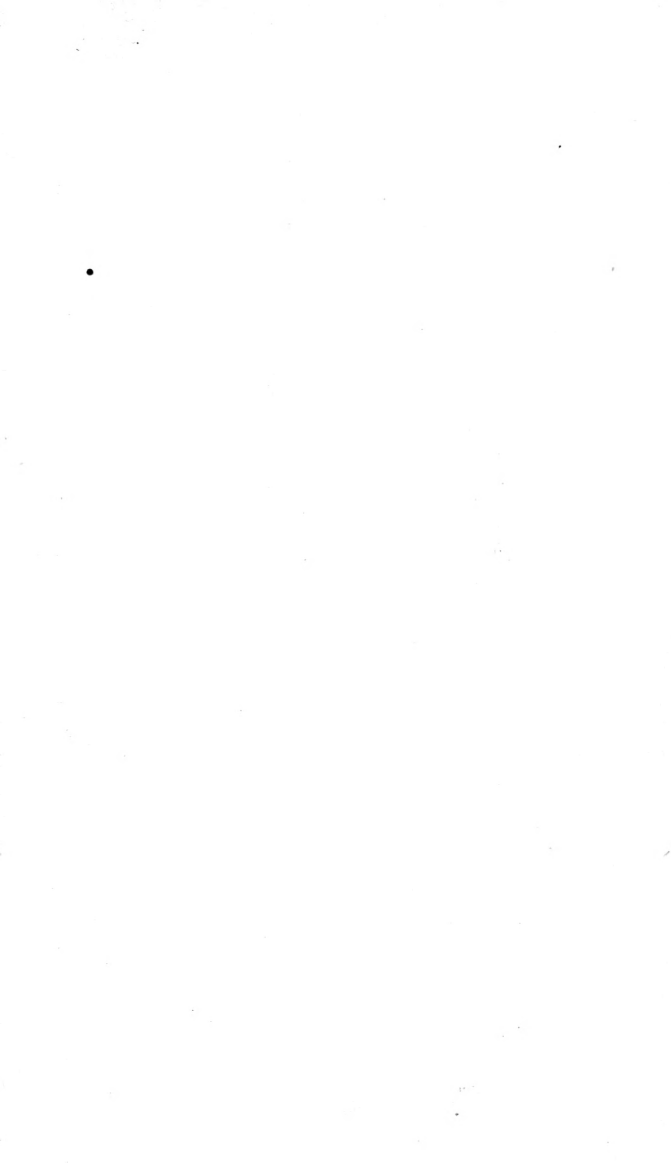
"To this must be added, by way of rendering the vulgarity of our theatre almost incurable, the radically depraved disposition of everything having any reference to the theatre. The companies of actors ought to be under the management of intelligent judges, and persons practised in the dramatic art and not themselves players. Engel presided for a time over the Berlin theatre, and eye-witnesses universally assert that he elevated it to an unusual height. What Goethe has effected in the management of the theatre of Weimar, in a small town, and with small means, is known to all good theatrical judges in Germany. Rare talents he can neither create nor reward, but he accustoms the actors to order and discipline, to which they are generally altogether disinclined, and thereby gives to his representations a unity and harmony, which we do not witness on larger theatres, where every individual plays as his own fancy prompts him. The incorrect manner in which their parts are got by heart, and the imperfection of their oral delivery, I have elsewhere censured. I have heard verses mutilated by a celebrated player in a manner which would at Paris be considered unpardonable in a beginner. I know that in a certain theatre, when they were under the melancholy necessity of representing a piece in verse, they wrote out the parts as prose, that the players might not be disturbed in their darling but stupid affectation of nature, by observation of the quantity. How many "periwig-pated fellows" (as Shakspeare called such people) "must we suffer, who imagine they are affording the public an enjoyment when they straddle along the boards with their awkward persons, considering the words which the poet has given them to repeat merely as a necessary evil. Our players are less anxious to please than the French. By the creation of standing national theatres as they are called, by which in several capitals people suppose that they have done something advantageous, and likely to improve the histrionic art, they have on the contrary put a complete end to all competition."

SIR EDWARD COKE.

"Every gift or grant from the king has this condition either expressly or tacitly annexed to it, *Ita quod patria per donationem illam magis solito non oneratur seu gravetur*, and, therefore, any grant made in grievance or prejudice of the subject is void; and 13 H. IV. 14 b, the king's grant which tends to the charge and prejudice of the subject is void. The 2d incident to a monopoly is, that after the monopoly is granted, the commodity is not so good and merchantable as it was before; for the patentee having the sole trade, regards only his private benefit, and not the commonwealth. 3rd. It tends to the impoverishment of divers artificers and others."







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